

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

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Midland Area Transportation Study

Metropolitan Planning Organization

220 W Ellsworth Street, Suite 326

Midland, Michigan 48640

Phone: (989) 832-6333

Fax: (989) 832-6608

Email: info@midlandmpo.com

Website: www.midlandmpo.org

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Introduction

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is mandated by federal law in all urbanized areas with populations greater than 50,000 to carry out the “3C” (continuing, cooperative and comprehensive) transportation planning process. In January 2013, the Midland Area Transportation Study (MATS) was designated as an MPO by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder. MATS is a single purpose agency that focuses on transportation planning services and issues, fulfilling federal requirements to maintain funding for its transportation network, providing management and policy functions for the transportation planning programs, as well as conducting regional transportation studies within its planning area. The MATS planning area is the entire geographic County of Midland, the geographic area of City of Auburn and Williams Township within Bay County, and the geographic area of Tittabawassee Township in Saginaw County.

MATS' goal is to assist in the development and preservation of a safe, effective, well-maintained, efficient, and economical transportation system for the Midland metropolitan area, while minimizing negative impacts on the physical and social environments and related land use. MATS' programs serve all people within its planning area, including minority populations, low-income populations, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and those who traverse the area. MATS recognizes its responsibility to provide fairness and equity in all of its programs and activities, and that it must abide by and enforce federal and state civil rights legislation related to transportation.

Since the enactment of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, MPOs have been required to develop and utilize a public involvement process that provides for complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and support for continuing involvement of the public in developing metropolitan transportation plans and transportation improvement program (TIP) project programming documents.

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) of 2012 updated the requirements of MPOs to develop, advertise, and adopt Participation Plans from the Safe, Affordable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which was enacted in 2005. Under SAFETEA-LU, coordination with the public was expanded to include consultation with local and state resource agencies specifically. The Participation Plan must contain the procedure by which the Metropolitan Planning Organization will obtain information regarding low-income and minority populations and perform analysis versus future projects outlined in the Long Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Plan so that potential environmental justice impacts may be identified.

Recently, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (P.L. 114-94) carried on these regulations in whole. In regards to public participation, MAP-21 (23 CFR Part 450.316) states that MPOs shall:

Include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs and meets the requirements and criteria specified as follows:

- i. Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised;*
- ii. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects (including but not limited to central city and other local jurisdiction concerns);*
- iii. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans and TIPs and open public meetings where matters related to the Federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered;*
- iv. Require adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of plans and TIPs (in nonattainment areas, classified as serious and above, the comment period shall be 45 days for the plan, TIP and major amendment(s));*
- v. Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development processes;*
- vi. Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households;*
- vii. When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan or TIP (including the financial plan) as a result of the public involvement process or the interagency consultation process required under the U.S. EPA's conformity regulations, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan and TIP;*
- viii. If the final transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP shall be made available;*
- ix. Public involvement processes shall be periodically reviewed by the MPO in terms of their effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open access to all;*
- x. These procedures will be reviewed by the FHWA and the FTA during certification reviews for TMAs, and as otherwise necessary for all MPOs, to assure that full and open access is provided to MPO decision making processes;*
- xi. Metropolitan public involvement processes shall be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans, and programs and reduce redundancies and costs.*

Summary of Public Participation Objectives

- Create a plan that will enable MATS to improve and increase public participation into the transportation planning process.
- Develop measures to prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of transportation benefits by low-income and minority population.
- Facilitate participation of non-traditional participants in the planning process.
- To provide and encourage timely and early participation to ensure the opportunity for comment (by stakeholders and the public) on transportation decisions.
- Develop transportation plans and projects that reflect MATS' communities' values.

Public Involvement Process

MAP-21 continues the SAFETEA-LU and ISTEA trends of federal legislation that moves the decision making authority away from the federal government and closer to the citizens. The federal government wants transportation decisions to be more responsive to state and local needs. In response, the Midland Area Transportation Study (MATS) has developed this Participation Plan that includes provisions to ensure early and continuing involvement of the public in the transportation planning process and the development of various transportation plans and reports. These provisions are the public involvement tools described herein.

[Public Involvement Tools](#)

Meeting Notices

All regularly scheduled meetings of the Midland Area Transportation Study (MATS) Policy and Technical Committees are open to the public and held at sites which comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. MATS holds its Policy Committee meetings on the first Tuesday of every month with advisory Technical Committee meetings held on the third Wednesday (unless otherwise scheduled). All meeting notices will be posted at least 7 calendar days in advance, on the MATS website (www.midlandmpo.org) and may also be published in a local news publication of general circulation within the Midland urbanized area (Midland Daily News). This is due to the declining circulation levels of newspapers and the large number of citizens getting their news from the internet. In addition, meetings will be publicized on the agency's Facebook page, and Twitter account. In any case, the method of communication with the highest effectiveness will always be utilized.

Public Comment Period

During each MATS Policy and Technical Committee meeting, time shall be allocated for public comment. The public may submit comments to MATS office in person or in any other form of communication (letters, phone, email, etc). All comments that are received will be relayed to the MATS Technical and Policy committees. To this end, all MATS meeting materials are made available for comment for at least 14 and up to 45 days in advance of the Policy Committee meeting for consideration. In addition, MATS encourages citizens to go to the source, that is, the best place to influence a project is at the local level - where projects begin. Projects are approved at the local level before they make it on to the MATS approved project list for federal funding. Lastly, MATS provides a wide variety of means by which the public can communicate comments, such as the MATS website, emails, mail and telephone calls, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Public Hearings

Before approving a Public Participation Plan, Long Range Transportation Plan or Transportation Improvement Program, MATS shall conduct a public hearing to solicit comments from the general public. Such hearings will take place during regularly scheduled Policy Committee meetings, and will be given advance notice just as in the case of regular meeting notices. MATS shall utilize any number of visual techniques and communication methods to assist in conveying the transportation plans and programs.

Announcements

To the extent feasible, MATS staff will utilize the opportunities provided through the Internet and local newspaper to inform the public of the development of transportation planning products such as the Long Range Transportation Plan or the Transportation Improvement Program. This would include news releases, notices on the MATS website (www.midlandmpo.org), as well as announcements on the agency's Facebook page and Twitter account.

Outreach

MATS will strive to implement the intent of MAP-21 with regards to stakeholder participation. MATS will work to encourage the involvement of persons who have been traditionally underserved, as well as to meet the requirements of Executive Order 12898 related to Environmental Justice. MATS, through various means of communication, will endeavor to notify as many of the groups listed below as practical when a particular project, study, or meeting agenda item directly impacts an organization or the clientele they represent. This applies also to the update of the Long Range Transportation Plan, the development of or a specific change in the TIP, or at the request of any MATS Committee member.

Stakeholder groups/organizations include those who represent the interests of:

- The elderly
- The disabled
- The non-motorized transportation user (pedestrian and bicycle)
- Minority populations
- Low income populations

At a minimum, the following additional groups in the MATS area will be notified of Long Range Transportation Plan and TIP development or updates:

- Representatives of public transportation employees
- Affected public agencies
- Private transportation providers
- Public safety departments, law enforcement agencies and fire departments and any other agency or entity responsible for safety/security operations
- Freight shippers and providers of freight transportation services
- Railroad companies
- Environmental organizations
- Major employers
- Chamber of Commerce
- Tourism offices
- Human service agencies
- Schools
- Interested citizens

In addition, utilization will be made of “A Citizen’s Guide to Better Streets”, a document produced by the Project for Public Spaces, Inc. in collaboration with the AARP. This document, available at https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws-website-ppsimages-na05y/pdf/bookstore/How_to_Engage_Your_Transportation_Agency_AARP.pdf usefully details the transportation planning process and the points at which citizens should be involved.

Visualization Techniques

Data visualization is a general term that describes any effort to help people understand the significance of data by placing it in a visual context. Patterns, trends and correlations that might go undetected in text-based data can be exposed and recognized easier with data visualization software.

MATS will utilize various visualization techniques to inform the public and convey the message of transportation projects, plans, and programs ranging from, but not limited to, static maps, GIS demonstrations, and computer simulations. For each individual project, plan, or program, MATS will use the most efficient visualization technique possible to best inform the public.

MATS visualizations will be used for displaying data in ways such as infographics, dials and gauges, geographic maps, sparklines, heat maps, and detailed bar, pie and fever charts. The images may include interactive capabilities, enabling users to manipulate them or drill into the data for querying and analysis, via the MATS website.

Treatment of Public Comments

When public comments are received on plans, studies, or other activities, they will be summarized and forwarded to the Policy Committee prior to any formal action to adopt or approve a plan or study. A copy of all comments will be filed and available for public review, if requested. Comments that request a formal response will be answered in a timely manner.

In summary, utilization of above involvement procedures/tools will ensure that citizens, public officials, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, users of public transit, private providers of transportation and other interested parties shall have full access to plans and programs, their supporting materials, and an opportunity to participate in all stages of the planning process. Therefore, the MATS Participation Plan reflects consultation with interested parties.

This Participation Plan lays out the process of public participation during the development of the Participation Plan, the Long Range Transportation Plan, and the Transportation Improvement Program. In addition the Participation Plan dictates the methods and timeline of adoption and publication of those reports to make them readily available for public review and comment. This is detailed in the Appendix as well as in the following subsections.

[Development of Public Participation Plan and Potential Revisions](#)

MATS will make the draft Participation Plan available to public via its website during the public comment period. Final approval of the Public Participation Plan requires input from both the general public and the Technical and Policy Committees and the public comment period of 45 days. In addition, the Participation Plan will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Following adoption of the Participation Plan, the Plan will be reviewed biennially for continued relevance and applicability based on information gathered by tracking such things as visits to our website, and engagement or reach from Facebook and Twitter posts. This provides a rough measure of the efficiency and effectiveness of both specific outreach efforts and the general overall strategy.

Any major revisions will necessitate undertaking the same measures used to develop the initial plan, including provision of the 45-day public comment period.

Participation Plan Process for Major Transportation Documents

There are three major federally-required documents that each MPO must develop and submit for public comment as a part of the planning process. Those include the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), and the Unified Work Program (UWP). Each of these will require participation and input from the general public in order for effective planning to take place within MATS. The public involvement for each one will be similar in nature, but with different timelines, and they will involve all of the previously mentioned tools during the process. The chronology for the LRTP, TIP and UWP is provided in the Appendix of this document in a graphical format.

The public participation process for each document begins with informing all the involved parties of how they can get their voice heard through the full range of communication methods, as previously described. Then MATS will try to obtain input from the public/interested agencies regarding any concerns with the transportation system in the area. Then, as appropriate, consultation with stakeholders and the public will be used to search for ways to improve the transportation system through the most effective means. The public is encouraged to provide feedback on the proposed plans during the public comment period when the draft documents are posted on the MATS website. MATS will then take any comments into consideration and make any necessary changes, prior to submitting documents to MDOT and FHWA/FTA for their approval. The entire process for some documents can take more than a year, but this timeframe, and the comment periods built into it, ensure that no one is left out during the process and the needs of everyone are considered. For a more perspective on the public involvement timelines for the Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program, and Unified Work Program, the tables in the Appendix should be referred to.

Public comment periods of 30 days will be provided prior to the adoption of major MATS transportation planning documents, specifically the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Major revisions of these documents will also require a 30 day public review period. Minor revisions or administrative modifications do not require an official public review period, however will be posted on the MATS website prior to approval by the Technical and Policy committees.

At least one public hearing will be conducted prior to the adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

The public participation process and time established for public review and comments on the TIP, satisfies Section 5307 public involvement requirements for the Program of Projects (POP) for the City of Midland Dial-A-Ride Transportation.

Benefits and Evaluation of Public Participation Plan

[Benefits of Participation](#)

Participation in the planning process by the general public has several significant benefits. With the distribution of meeting notices via multiple channels and processes, the public has the opportunity to attend meetings by themselves or with neighbors to voice their concerns, with and thus have the chance to affect and benefit the entire neighborhood.

Providing feedback at Policy and Technical Committee meetings during the public comment period of MATS documents will give staff input as to how to improve the document content. Some of these comments may not have come to the attention of agency representatives earlier in the planning process.

Attending meetings will also make the general public more informed as to what goes on in the transportation planning process, and they can pass the information on to others, thus getting more people involved and informed about the planning process or specific projects. A sign-in sheet is available at every MATS scheduled meeting for the public to sign in, and is used to assist in gauging the public's involvement in the meetings and planning process.

Another benefit of public participation is conflict management of any problem that may arise during the process. If the problem surfaces during the early stages of project/plan development, it can be resolved much easier and more cost effectively than if it were to happen later on in the process. So if anyone in the general public notices any problems with MATS programs or projects, then they need to make sure that an interested representative is made aware of the situation so that it can be taken care of in a timely manner.

[Evaluation of Effectiveness](#)

Evaluation is a relatively new component of public policy-making, but is seen as increasingly important as the use of new engagement techniques become more common. MATS will continue to support efforts to expand public participation in the planning process, as well as evaluating the results in the most effective manner. This will include continuous research into best practices and outcome evaluation, as documents are created, released, and amended.

MATS will utilize a four-part evaluation process for public participation that can help determine if either the public or the agency benefited from the public's engagement, developed by The Institute for Local Government in California. In this process, there are at least four different public engagement outcomes that local officials can review:

1. **The appropriateness and effectiveness of the engagement process design and delivery, including the “satisfaction” of participants with the process.** *Did the chosen process “fit” the problem, provide the sort of information needed, and meet participation goals? Was it done well?*
2. **The impacts on public decisions, policies and actions.** *Was the ultimate agency decision different and/ or better than would otherwise have been the case?*
3. **The changes to the capacity for participation by community residents.** *Has the completed engagement activity made it more or less likely that the public, including appropriate neighborhood/ community organizations, has the interest, information, and skills to get involved?*
4. **The changes to the local agency’s capacity to effectively develop and carry out other public engagement efforts in the future.** *Was the public engagement activity seen solely as a one-time event, or are sponsors using it to build a more sustained agency capacity for soliciting the public’s ideas and recommendations?*

Statistics can be used to determine the "return on the investment" of utilizing public participation tools. For example, the number of persons attending an activity can be compared to the number of persons that were notified of that activity. This type of evaluation can be an indicator of whether or not the tools used for public participation are actually reaching the intended audience, or which tools had a greater response rate. MATS can reach out to agencies that specifically deal with groups of low-income, minority, or elderly citizens to see if their strategies of public involvement are meeting the needs of these individuals. Survey responses will be tabulated and evaluated, and the results of the analysis will be compared to the evaluation measures to determine the rate of success of the public participation tools.

Another possible evaluation technique that can be used in the future is to utilize data analytics regarding web traffic. This will show how many people from the general public are viewing the site and are interested in the happenings of the MPO.

Environmental Justice

In April 1997 the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued an order to *Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (DOT Order 5610.2)*. The order generally describes the process for incorporating environmental justice principles into all DOT programs, policies, and activities.

Environmental justice is an important part of the planning process and must be considered in all phases of planning. This includes all Participation Plans and activities, the development of Regional Transportation Plans and Transportation Improvement Programs that will be prepared and adopted by MATS.

There are three fundamental concepts to environmental justice:

1. To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.
2. To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.
3. To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority populations and low-income populations.

For the purpose of Environmental Justice analysis and understanding, a couple of terms need to be defined, these are “minority” and “low-income”. According to the US DOT Order 5610.2, the following groups are defined as a “minority”:

1. African American (a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa).
2. American Indian and Alaskan Native (a person having origins in any of the original people of North America and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition).
3. Asian American (a person having origins in any of the original people of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent).
4. Hispanic (a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race).
5. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa or other Pacific Islands).
6. Other minorities (a person having origins from the regions not included in "African American," "American Indian and Alaskan Native," "Asian American," "Hispanic," or "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander")

“Low-income” is defined as a person whose household income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These guidelines change every year due to inflation, and also depend on the amount of people in the household.

[Environmental Justice Evaluation Process](#)

MATS has identified Census block groups where low-income and minority populations live so that their needs can be identified and addressed, and the benefits and burdens of transportation investments can be fairly distributed. MATS will continue to work to identify residential, employment, and transportation patterns of low-income and minority populations. MATS will also continue to evaluate and where necessary, improve the Participation Plan to eliminate barriers and engage minority and low-income populations in transportation decision making.

However, this cannot be achieved without the involvement of the public, community groups, and other organizations. These individuals and groups advance the intent of environmental justice in transportation when involved in public participation activities (meetings, hearings, advisory groups) to help MATS understand community needs, perceptions, and goals. In order for the MPO to better understand the needs of everyone in the community, members of each respective group are invited to participate in meetings and other gatherings to voice their opinions and to offer their input. This will ensure that the strategies will be developed jointly and cooperatively between MATS and community organizations representing various groups, including low-income populations and minority populations.

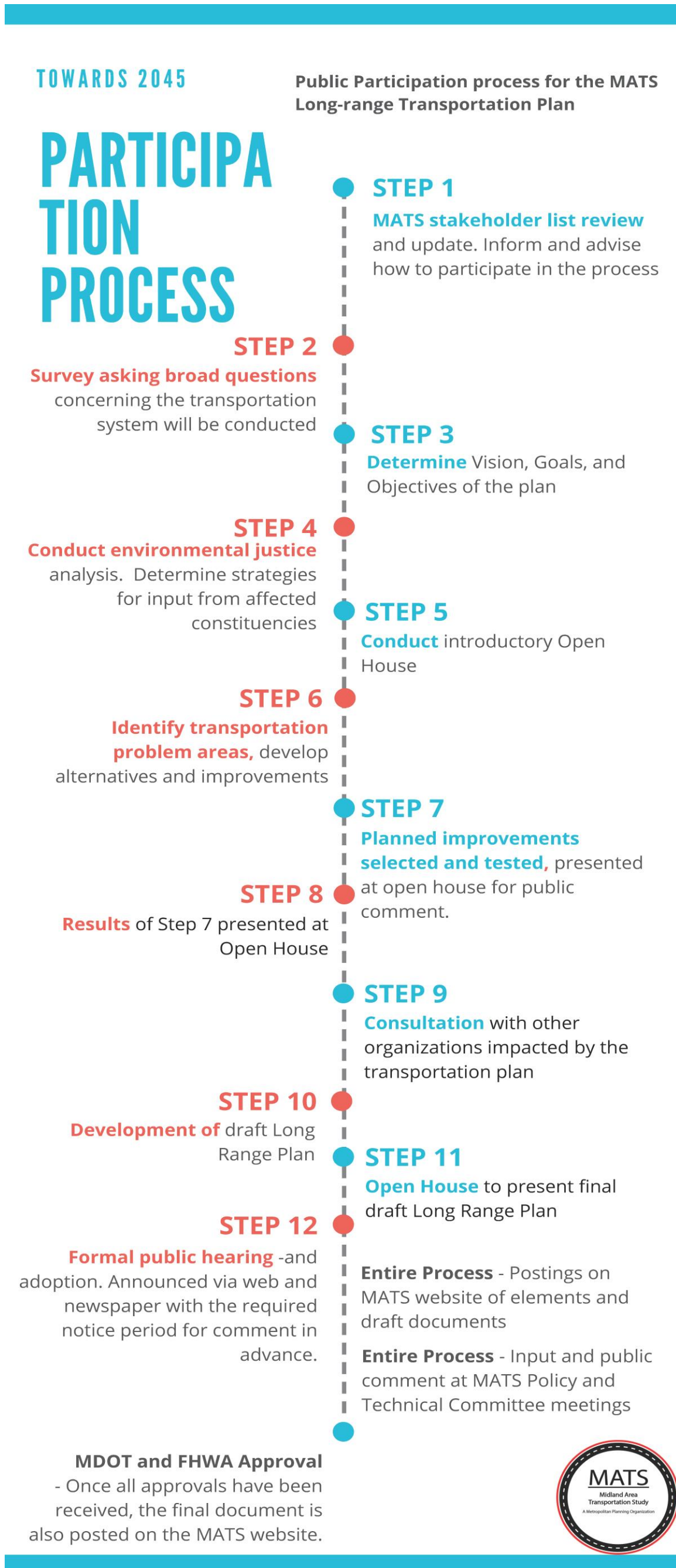
Our basic message to all citizens is that the earlier you get involved, the better your chances will be to create the impact you desire. There are many situations where public participation has influenced transportation decisions made in our community. Transportation programs and projects cannot proceed without citizen acceptance and support that come through an educated public and an open inclusive process.

Summary

This Participation Plan specifies various provisions to ensure early and continuing involvement of the public in the transportation planning process within MATS area and the development of its transportation plans and reports. These provisions guarantee access and input by the public and encourage proactive public participation to all aspects of the transportation planning process within MATS area. Final approval and adoption of the Public Participation Plan requires input from both the general public and the Technical and Policy Committees and the public comment period of 45 days. Public comment periods of 30 days will be provided prior to the adoption of major MATS transportation planning documents, specifically the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This increased access for local citizens and other groups to transportation planning will help foster the continuous improvement of MATS plans and programs to serve the Midland area.

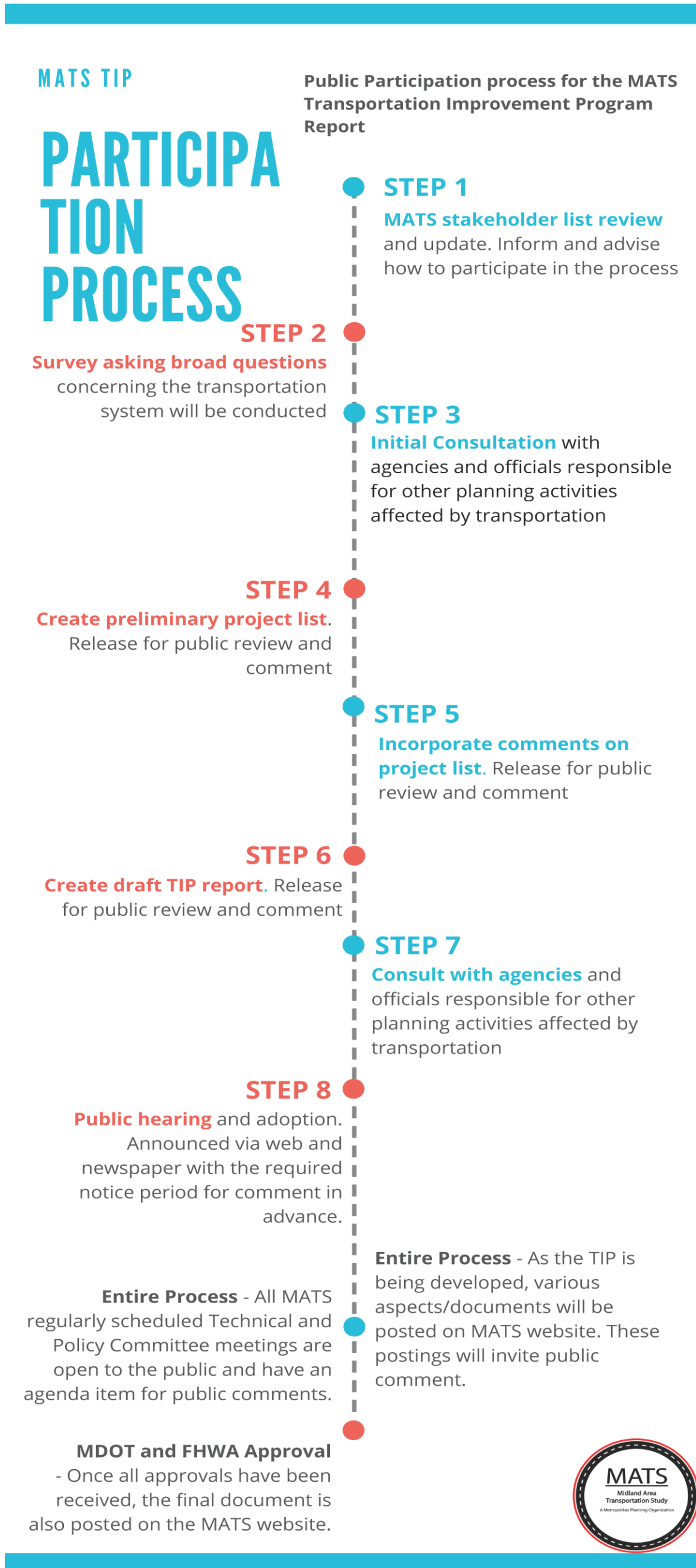
APPENDIX

Table 1 - MATS Long Range Plan Participation Process



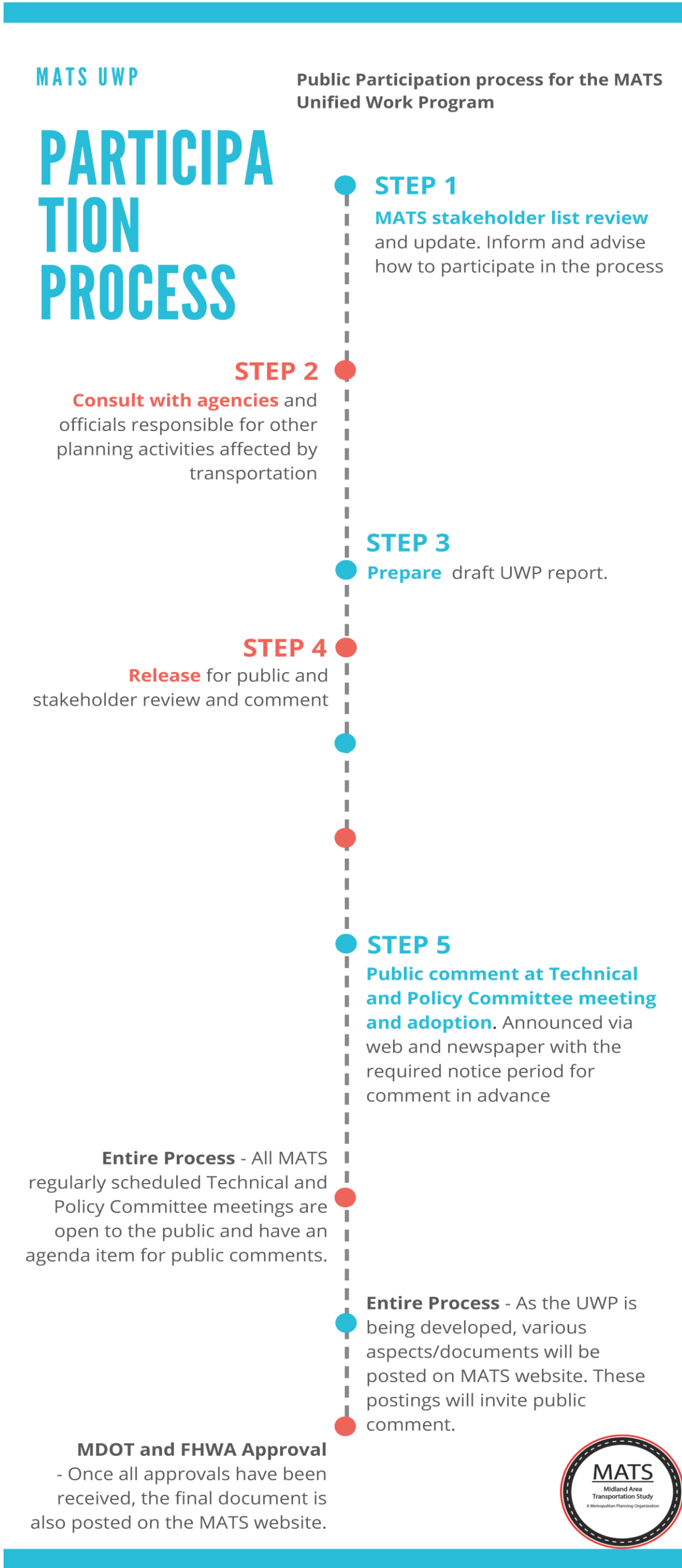
*Long Range Plan participation process can take from 1 to 3 years.

Table 2 - MATS Transportation Improvement Program Participation Process



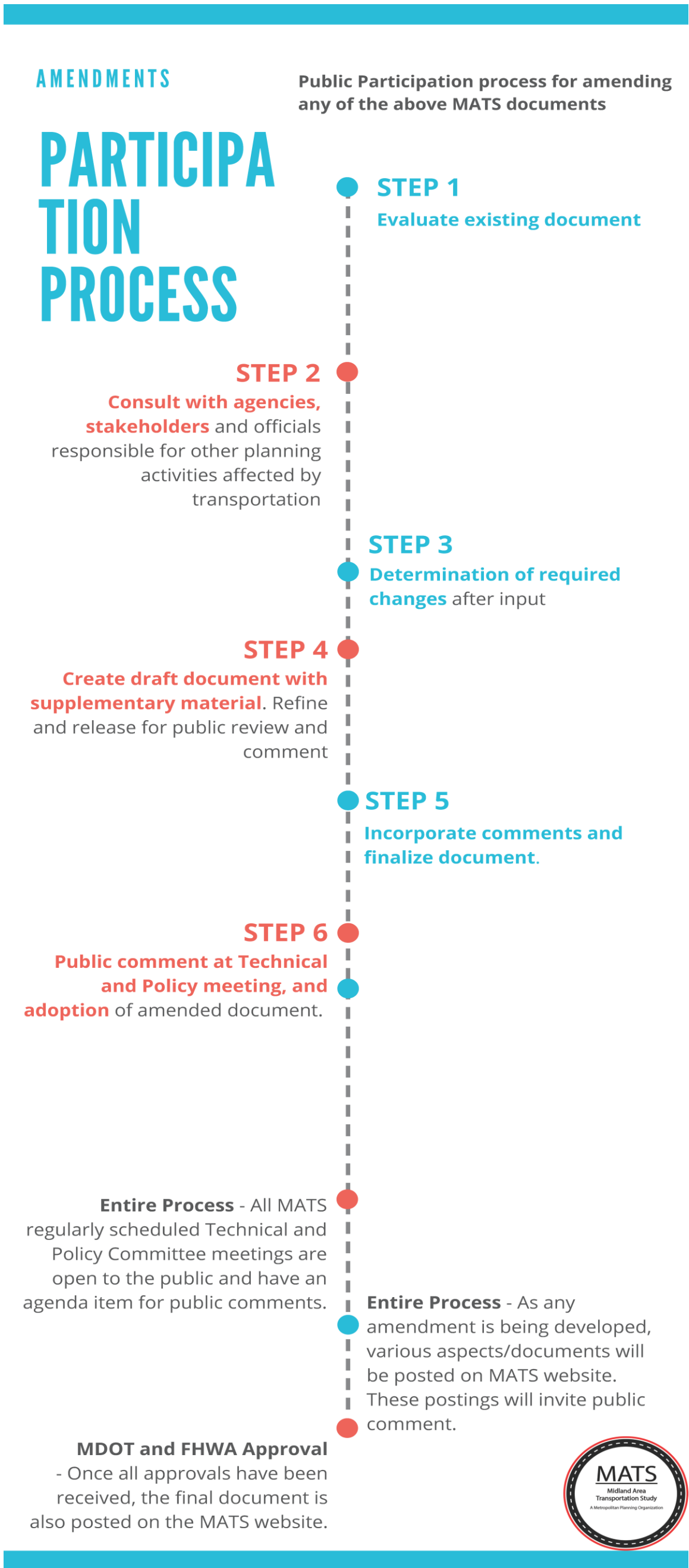
*TIP participation process can take from 3 to 8 month

Table 3 - MATS Unified Work Program Participation Process



*UWP participation process can take from 1 to 3 months

Table 4 – Amendment of Existing Document Participation Process



*The amendment process for any of the previous documents can take from 1 to 6 months