

Public Participation Plan

September
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HIRTA

Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency



HIRTA serves the counties of Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Madison, Marion, Story and Warren in Central Iowa

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Introduction

It is the intent of the Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA) to provide every opportunity for riders, citizens, elected officials, and other interested parties to be involved in decisions about the transit services HIRTA provides. The procedures outlined in this document ensure that the public has reasonable access to HIRTA's service plans and program documents, and has adequate opportunity to share their opinions and concerns about transit service in the region.

HIRTA Public Transit

Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (Region 11) serves seven central Iowa counties, Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Madison, Marion, Story, and Warren, with a total population of 314,038 as of the 2020 census. The HIRTA Board consists of one Supervisor from each of the seven counties, Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Madison, Marion, Story, and Warren, appointed annually by their respective county Board of Supervisors.

Mission

Provide customer-focused community transportation with a commitment to excellence in safety and service promoting independent lifestyles for central Iowa residents.

Vision

To become the transit provider of choice making a positive difference by enhancing community livability through safe, innovative, sustainable regional transportation options and promoting independent lifestyles for central Iowa residents.

Goals

1. Inform and Educate the Public:

The public is kept informed and up to date through clear, accurate information about services shared via a variety of communication methods, including timely notice of changes that may affect riders. Services, policies, and programs are explained clearly, giving riders and community members the information needed to understand rural public transit in the region and provide informed feedback.

2. Reach out and build Connections:

The region's communities are invited to participate through ongoing outreach and engagement. New relationships with organizations and communities remain a continued priority.

3. Engage the public and encourage continued participation:

Communication with the public is a key element in developing goals and outcomes. New relationships continue to be built with organizations and communities that serve groups that have been traditionally under-represented. Regular board meetings are open to the public and include a public comment opportunity.

4. Evaluate public participation:

We regularly review our public engagement activities to ensure they remain effective, identify areas for improvement, and incorporate new or better outreach methods as they become available, helping HIRTA sustain best practices in public participation over time.

Principals

HIRTA follows four guiding principles to plan outreach and involve the public in decision-making. While each plan or program may call for its own specific approach, these principles guide all HIRTA's public engagement efforts:

1. Meet people where they are.
2. Provide flexible options for involvement.
3. Be a good community partner.
4. Consistently evaluate what does and doesn't work.

Public Involvement

Public Participation is an open process which seeks out and encourages early and continuous public involvement throughout the development of transportation plans and projects. As part of the transportation planning process, HIRTA encourages citizen input.

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

Public Input

The methods described in the Public Participation Plan cover a range of ways in which HIRTA engages with its customers and the general public. HIRTA understands that decisions about budgets as well as reduction in services or increase in fares are of particular importance, and therefore HIRTA has the following guidelines when considering such changes:

- **Major Service Changes and Fare Changes**

HIRTA 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 on any system-wide 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 HIRTA Board meetings.
- A notice of the final changes will be posted within 15 days of implementation.
- The HIRTA 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.

Outreach and Participation Efforts

HIRTA is committed to ensuring all Region 11 residents can access HIRTA meetings and are encouraged to share their input, with particular attention to those with limited access to public decision-making, including but not limited to LEP community members, minority populations, and low-income individuals.

As a recipient of federal funding, HIRTA will follow Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Title VI guidance by actively seeking and considering the viewpoints of these populations throughout its public outreach and engagement efforts.

Direct Communication Methods

The following is a range of methods HIRTA uses for sharing information.

- **HIRTA's website:** www.ridehirta.com is a primary source of information for riders and the public.
- **RSS Feed emails:** HIRTA's mass email subscription service sends updates to subscribers. Customers can sign up on HIRTA's website to receive these emails.
- **HIRTA Connection newsletter:** Subscribe at www.ridehirta.com/thehirtaconnection.
- **On-board flyers:** Posted in highly visible areas on all buses, flyers communicate directly with HIRTA riders.
- **Emails to partner agencies:** Notices, letters, announcements, and promotional materials are sent to key staff at partner agencies for distribution to their own email lists.
- **Press releases:** Distributed to HIRTA's media contact list, including local newspapers, the Des Moines Register, and local radio stations, to generate news coverage of HIRTA changes, meetings, and other updates. Press releases are also posted on the News page of HIRTA's website.
- **Partners' websites:** HIRTA shares information with partner agencies, including county and city websites across the region, to help reach riders and the public in each county served.
- **Public notices:** Published in the Des Moines Register, local newspapers when appropriate, on HIRTA's website, and at HIRTA's office.
- **Targeted markets:** Strategic marketing efforts are used at times to reach specific audience segments with tailored messages.
- **HIRTA's Facebook page:** Used to inform and interact with riders. Customers can contact HIRTA through Facebook and receive a response within one business day.
- **Transportation Advisory Groups (TAGs):** The HIRTA Transportation Advisory Group brings together community stakeholders and business representatives focused on advancing and improving public transportation. The TAG connects local communities, businesses, and agencies with HIRTA, offering local and regional input that helps shape HIRTA's Strategic Plan. Voting members represent any governmental entity located wholly or partially within HIRTA's region with a population of at least 1,000, ensuring informed, firsthand representation across the region.

Open Meeting

The HIRTA Board of Directors meets the 4th Thursday of each month at 9:00 a.m. at the HIRTA Central office, 2824 104th Street, Urbandale, IA. These meetings are open to the public and include an opportunity for the public to comment on items related to public transit.

The meeting agendas and minutes, along with information on how to attend are published on our website at www.ridehirta.com/board

In Summary

HIRTA's 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 Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA) region.

HIRTA may modify public participation methods over time based on feedback from customers and the general public. This Participation Plan is a "living" document that will be updated periodically to reflect community preferences, changing demographics and transit services, as well as respond to new communication and outreach methods.