
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

KDOT's Public Involvement Program was formally created in 1997, although KDOT has undertaken public involvement activities for many years. The mission of the program is to foster effective two-way communication, facilitate citizen participation, and help KDOT and its customers work together to provide a statewide transportation system that meets the needs of Kansas.

The program is guided by the Bureau of Public Involvement, within the Division of Public Affairs. A Bureau Chief of Public Involvement and two Headquarters Public Involvement Liaisons assist engineers in the Division of Engineering and Design with public involvement activities for projects in development.

The program is further strengthened by a District Public Affairs Manager in each of the agency's six districts and a Public Affairs Manager at the Wichita Metro Area Office. These District Managers focus on local and regional public affairs for construction and maintenance projects, assist with public involvement for projects in development, work with local news media, and foster relationships with citizens and businesses at local levels. Community Affairs Managers, located in Chanute and Garden City serve

communities in southeast and southwest Kansas, focusing on fostering relationships with local governments, school districts, and economic development groups.

The Purpose of Public Involvement

Public involvement helps KDOT engineers make informed decisions that address the values, concerns, and issues of people potentially affected by transportation projects. Public involvement can help identify and clarify important issues, help identify environmental constraints and possible mitigation, and help bring out potentially helpful ideas. Incorporating public input with current engineering criteria and a variety of other factors can provide a basis on which to develop or select alternatives. Thus, the public's participation contributes to the larger body of knowledge used to help make planning, programming, design, and construction decisions.

The Public's Role in Project Selection

The general public and public officials play important roles in determining several types of projects listed in this STIP. The authority and responsibility for project decisions ultimately rest with the Secretary of Transportation.

-
1. KDOT annually solicits requests from cities for eligible projects in the City Connecting Link (KLINK) Resurfacing Program. Cities requesting projects are encouraged to review their proposals with the District Engineer serving their region.
 2. The Bureau of Traffic Engineering conducts studies on the physical and operational characteristics of high-accident locations under the Safety Projects set-aside program. When necessary, the studies include identifying and evaluating problems perceived by the public.
 3. The twelve-member Highway Advisory Commission is appointed by the Governor and is comprised of two members of the general public from each of KDOT's six districts. The Commission reviews proposals for projects under the Geometric Improvement Project and Economic Development Project categories of the Major Modification Program. The Commission then recommends projects to the Secretary of Transportation, who makes the final selection. Project proposals are initially solicited from local governments. Applicants are encouraged to review their proposals with the District Engineer serving their region.
 4. Transportation Enhancement Program project applications are solicited from cities and counties. Applicants are strongly encouraged to provide evidence of local public support for their proposed project.
 5. Corridor master plans under the Corridor Management Program are implemented through partnerships with local units of government.
 6. The five Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are required to include public involvement in their Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Programs.
 7. Projects selected under the System Enhancement Program (SEP) were solicited from local units of government. Many applications were available for local public scrutiny and comment prior to being submitted to KDOT. Selections for SEP projects were based in part on the findings of an ad hoc Economic Development Review Panel, a group of citizens appointed by the Governor to evaluate the applicant projects' potentials to enhance economic development.
 8. The Local Partnership Railroad Grade Separation program (a component of the statewide Comprehensive Transportation Program) addresses highway/railroad at-grade crossings both on and off the state highway system which are on lower priority routes. Project applications were solicited from local units of government and included 10 to 20 percent local matching funds. Projects were prioritized based on the Design Hazard Rating formula, which also ranks other highway/railroad crossing projects.
-

-
9. Federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) Hazard Elimination (HES) Project funds are allocated in part based on location information submitted by local units of government.

The Public and the Priority Formulas for Project Selection

KDOT uses Priority Formulas to select and prioritize many of the projects in the Major Modification and Priority Bridge programs. The formulas help KDOT meet the challenge of making objective decisions about where to spend limited resources and which problems to work on first. Characteristics that contribute to road safety are key criteria in each of the formulas. There is no doubt that everyone is concerned about safe transportation. Among the safety concerns expressed by the public are:

1. The numbers of accidents along certain roads or at specific locations;
2. Perceived risks in the presence of congested traffic;
3. Road characteristics such as narrow shoulders, “tight” curves, limited sight distances, and rough driving surfaces.

These issues are also reflected in statistically valid public telephone surveys KDOT conducts when studying certain projects early in their development. There is an inherent risk in transportation systems, even though modern technology and engineering practices continue to help

move people safely and efficiently. Since KDOT’s goal is to provide a safe and efficient transportation system, a variety of safety issues are addressed in virtually every project undertaken by the agency.

Safety perceptions vary between people and sometimes their perceptions are not supported by objective data. A road that seems safe to one driver may feel unsafe to another. Or, the opposite may occur. Many safety issues reflect engineering characteristics that can be measured objectively. A seemingly safe road may have measurable safety problems. Conversely, a road that some feel is unsafe may have no measurable safety problems. Only measurable safety characteristics are included in the factors used in the Priority Formulas. While the Priority Formulas focus on real issues rather than varying perceptions, they nevertheless address many safety concerns expressed by the public. The Priority Formulas are explained in greater detail later in this document.

Partnership Project and the Local Consult Process

The Partnership Project (P2) was designed as a top to bottom review of KDOT by KDOT and its advisory group. Started in 2003, the goal was to find ways for the Department to be more responsive to internal and external customers and become a more efficient agency.

One of the priorities coming from the P2 project was to nurture better relationships with local governments. P2 identified the importance of involving local officials early and often in planning, project programming, and project development. As a result, KDOT is renewing its efforts to partner with local governments and will implement recommendations which arise from this effort. The local consultation process will provide for increased interaction between KDOT District staff and local officials and will include activities to get input from local officials about project programming priorities and scopes. The process will allow KDOT to enhance partnerships with local officials; encourage better coordination among headquarters, district, and field staff; and meet a federal requirement.