



Virtual Public Engagement During and Beyond COVID-19

Wainford Mill

New Jersey Division Office

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Order of Presentation

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- Public Involvement Foundation
- FHWA VPI Guidance
- Introduction to EDC-6
- VPI Tools
- Experiences with VPI



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Public Involvement Foundation

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- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969
- 23 U.S.C. 134 and 135
- 23 CFR 450.210 and 450.316
- Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice (February 11, 1994)

Early and Continuous Opportunities

Establish early and continuous public involvement opportunities... 23 CFR 450.210 (a)(1)(viii)&(ix) and 450.316 (a)(1)(vii)

Early coordination, public involvement, and project development.

"Early coordination with appropriate agencies and the public aids in determining the type of environmental review documents an action requires, the scope of the document, the level of analysis, and related environmental requirements. This involves the exchange of information from the inception of a proposal for action to preparation of the environmental review documents." 23 CFR 771.111(a)(1)

Early and continuing

"For the Federal-aid highway program: (1) Each State must have procedures approved by the FHWA to carry out a public involvement/public hearing program pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 128 and 139 and CEQ regulation. (2) State public involvement/public hearing procedures must provide for:

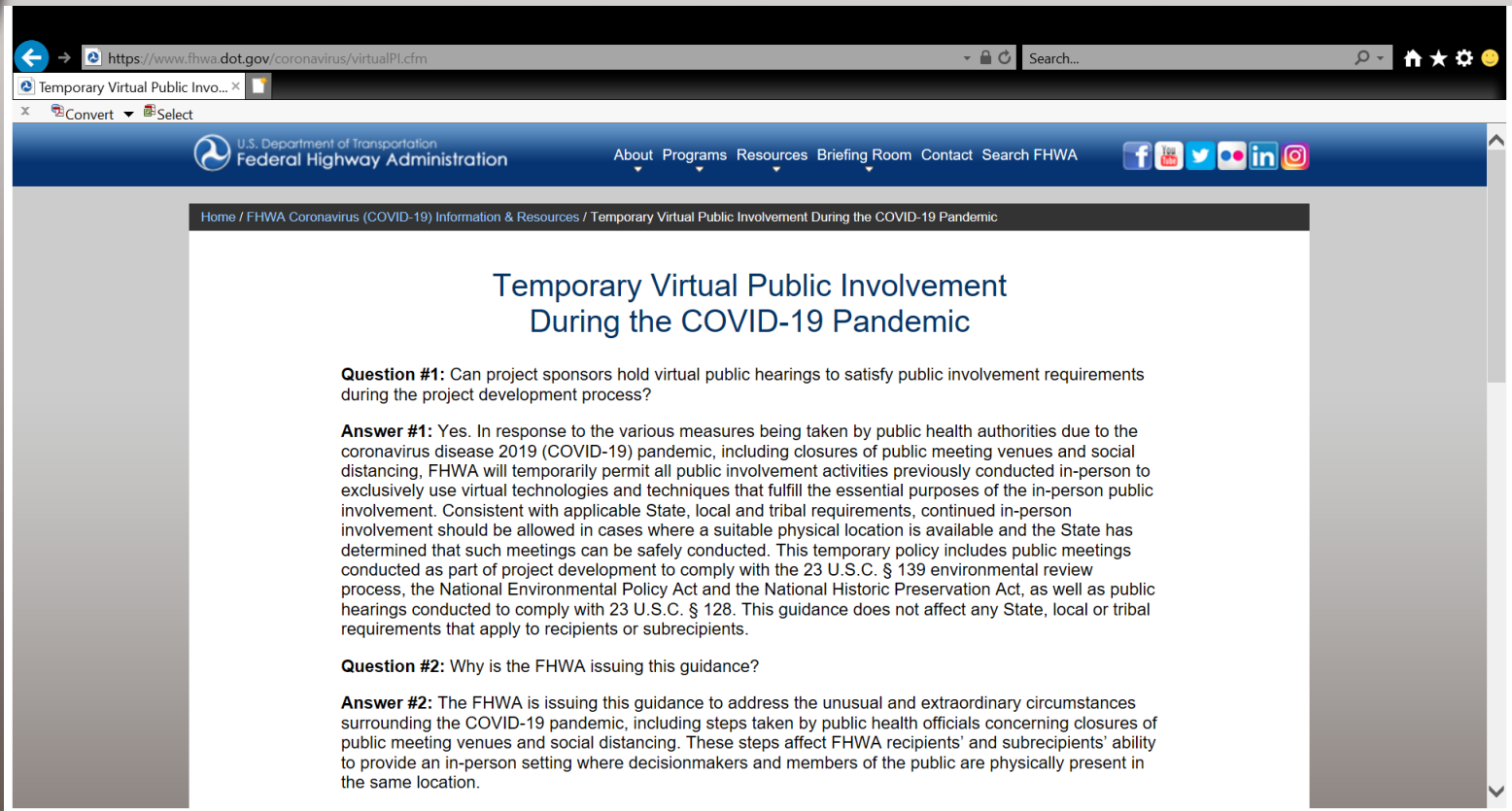
- i. Coordination of public involvement activities and public hearings with the entire NEPA process.
- ii. Early and continuing opportunities during project development for the public to be involved in the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts, as well as impacts associated with relocation of individuals, groups, or institutions.
- iii. One or more public hearings or the opportunity for hearing(s) to be held by the State highway agency at a convenient time and place for any Federal-aid project which requires significant amounts of right-of-way, substantially changes the layout or functions of connecting roadways or of the facility being improved, has a substantial adverse impact on abutting property, otherwise has a significant social, economic, environmental or other effect, or for which the FHWA determines that a public hearing is in the public interest.
- iv. Reasonable notice to the public of either a public hearing or the opportunity for a public hearing. Such notice will indicate the availability of explanatory information. The notice shall also provide information required to comply with public involvement requirements of other laws, Executive orders, and regulations.
- v. Explanation at the public hearing of the following information, as appropriate:



FHWA Temporary VPI Guidance

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Federal Highway Administration

Home / FHWA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information & Resources / Temporary Virtual Public Involvement During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Temporary Virtual Public Involvement During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Question #1: Can project sponsors hold virtual public hearings to satisfy public involvement requirements during the project development process?

Answer #1: Yes. In response to the various measures being taken by public health authorities due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, including closures of public meeting venues and social distancing, FHWA will temporarily permit all public involvement activities previously conducted in-person to exclusively use virtual technologies and techniques that fulfill the essential purposes of the in-person public involvement. Consistent with applicable State, local and tribal requirements, continued in-person involvement should be allowed in cases where a suitable physical location is available and the State has determined that such meetings can be safely conducted. This temporary policy includes public meetings conducted as part of project development to comply with the 23 U.S.C. § 139 environmental review process, the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act, as well as public hearings conducted to comply with 23 U.S.C. § 128. This guidance does not affect any State, local or tribal requirements that apply to recipients or subrecipients.

Question #2: Why is the FHWA issuing this guidance?

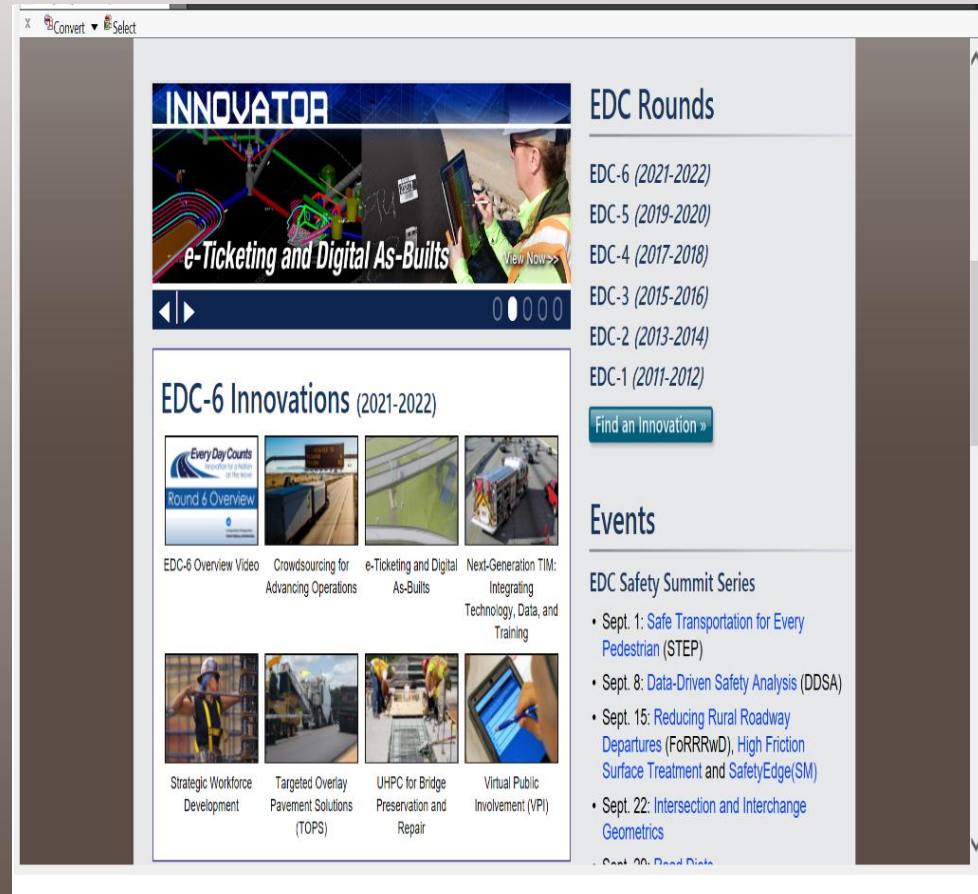
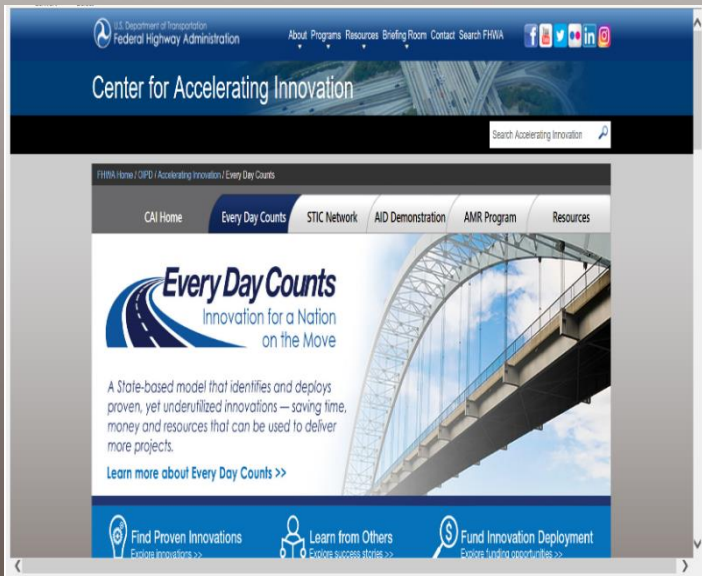
Answer #2: The FHWA is issuing this guidance to address the unusual and extraordinary circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, including steps taken by public health officials concerning closures of public meeting venues and social distancing. These steps affect FHWA recipients' and subrecipients' ability to provide an in-person setting where decisionmakers and members of the public are physically present in the same location.



Every Day Counts

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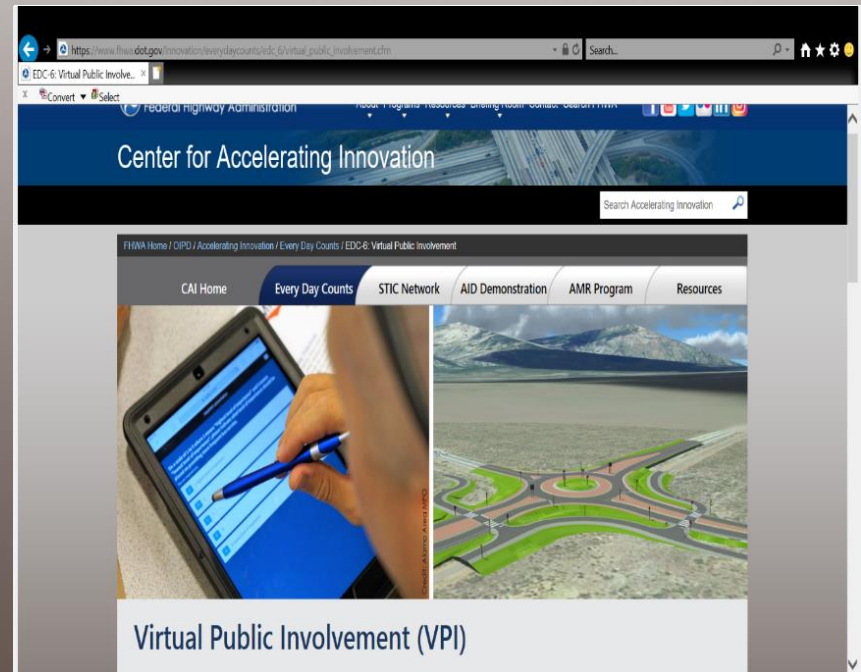
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VPI Tools

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1. Mobile Applications
2. Project Visualizations
3. Do-It-Yourself Videos
4. Crowdsourcing Tools
5. Virtual Town Halls
6. Mapping Tools
7. All-in-One Tools
8. Digital Tools to Enhance In-Person Events



Experiences with VPI

New Jersey Division Office



U.S. Department of Transportation
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Public Involvement

Authorizing Legislation PHWA → Planning → Public Involvement → Virtual Public Involvement → Fact Sheets

Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About: Virtual Town Halls

What are Virtual Town Halls?

Public meetings are an essential part of the transportation planning and project development process. They provide a forum for stakeholders to learn about projects and investments, ask questions and interact with agency staff, and provide opinions and input on the local or regional transportation network.

With careful planning, face-to-face meetings can bring together diverse groups of stakeholders. They can elicit valuable feedback for staff and build support for transportation projects. However, public meetings require a great deal of time, labor, and funding to design, promote, and facilitate. What's more, stakeholders with busy schedules may find it burdensome to travel to a public meeting venue on a specific date and time.

Virtual town halls or virtual public meetings offer stakeholders a way to take part in the planning process without traveling to a meeting location, such as a school or conference center. Stakeholders may join the meeting via teleconference, or by using

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Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About: Do-It-Yourself Videos

What are Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Videos?

Video content – whether viewed on television or on the web – reaches people in a very different way than written or published material. Video has been a mainstay of internet content for several decades.


Today's tablets, smartphones, and digital cameras make it easier than ever for individuals to create high-quality live or recorded videos. Features like image stabilization, drones, and other equipment have become ever more affordable and accessible to consumers, giving agency staff an alternative to hiring costly video production firms to create video messages.

Transportation agency videos about plans, projects, events, and more can be posted to streaming sites, shared on social media, and made accessible on project websites. By creating DIY videos, planners and program managers can create personalized, accessible content about a project to share with stakeholders, reaching potentially new audiences through a popular medium.



Thank You

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The screenshot displays the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) website. The top navigation bar includes the FHWA logo, the text "U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration", and links for "About Programs Resources Briefing Room Contact Search FHWA". Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube are also present. Below this, the "Office of Planning, Environment, & Realty (HEP)" is highlighted. A secondary navigation bar contains tabs for "Planning", "Environment", "Real Estate", "HEP", "Events", "Guidance", "Publications", "Glossary", "Awards", and "Contacts". The main content area features a "Public Involvement" banner with a collage of images showing public meetings and community engagement. Below the banner, a left sidebar lists various resources: "Authorizing Legislation", "Statute, Regulation and Executive Orders", "Case Studies", "Project Development", "Virtual Public Involvement" (highlighted), "Video Case Studies", "Fact Sheets", "Peer Exchanges", "Publications", "Reference Tool", "Related Links", and "Other Resources". The main content area below the banner shows a breadcrumb trail "FHWA → Planning → Public Involvement" and a section titled "Virtual Public Involvement". This section features a video player with the title "Innovation Spotlight: Virtual Public Involvement" and the FHWA logo. A "Watch on YouTube" button is located at the bottom of the video player. The video player also displays the "On-Ramp to Innovation" logo with the tagline "every day counts".

