

# APC

Regional Transportation  
Community Engagement Plan

## **A Guide to Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Basics**



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Are you a locally elected official who has an influence on transportation decisions for your community? Or maybe you are a community leader, a committed advocate, or perhaps a newly hired community planner?

If you are interested in understanding how the regional transportation planning process works, then this guide is for you!

This guide will help you learn more about:

- » how metropolitan areas like Atlanta comply with federal regulations for transportation planning
- » what processes must be followed to be eligible for transportation funds
- » what kind of transportation plans the Atlanta Regional Commission develops and adopts
- » the regional committee structure that supports the transportation planning process
- » how the public gets involved in transportation decision-making

Here's a list of all the guides - check them out!

- [A Resident's Guide to Regional Transportation Planning](#)
- [A Guide to Metropolitan Planning Organization \(MPO\) Basics](#)
- [Community Engagement: Values, Techniques, and Process](#)

Federal law requires all metropolitan areas with populations greater than 50,000 people to designate a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to develop transportation plans for the region. It also requires that a Public Participation Plan be created that affords the public a reasonable opportunity to participate in and comment on transportation plans. This plan is intended to fulfill those requirements outlined in 23 Code of US Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450.210 and 450.316. The content of this publication reflects the views of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the Department of Transportation, State of Georgia, or the Federal Highway Administration. Additionally, as reflected in Section VI of the 2009 Atlanta Quad Party Agreement (Memorandum of Agreement for Transportation Planning Coordination and Cooperation in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area (MPA) between the Atlanta Regional Commission, Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, and Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority), this Public Participation Plan satisfies the region's Program of Transit Projects (POP) public participation requirements for the Urbanized Area Formula Program required in Section 9 of the Federal Transit Act Title 49, U.S. Code Section 5307 (b)(1) through (7) for the Atlanta Regional Commission and transit operators within the MPO area (Cherokee Area Transit, Cobb Community Transit, Douglas County Rideshare, Gwinnett County Transit, Henry County Transit, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, Spalding County, and GRTA (Xpress)). It is the policy of the Atlanta Regional Commission that no person shall on the grounds of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination in any operation of the Atlanta Regional Commission as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes. Any questions or concerns about discrimination may be referred to the ARC Title VI Officer at [bwald@atlantaregional.org](mailto:bwald@atlantaregional.org) or 470.463.1494. Publication is prepared in cooperation with the Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration.

The "Regional Transportation Community Engagement Plan" for the Atlanta Metropolitan Region consists of the following modules:

- Resident's Guide to Regional Transportation Planning
- A Guide to Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Basics
- Community Engagement Values, Techniques and Process

## RELEVANT ACRONYMS

<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act
<b>ARC</b>	Atlanta Regional Commission
<b>ATL</b>	Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority
<b>CAA</b>	Clean Air Act
<b>CDR</b>	Conformity Determination Report
<b>CEN</b>	Community Engagement Network
<b>CFR</b>	Code of Federal Regulations
<b>CMS</b>	Congestion Management System
<b>CTP</b>	Comprehensive Transportation Plans
<b>DCA</b>	Department of Community Affairs
<b>DRI</b>	Developments of Regional Impact
<b>EPA</b>	Environmental Protection Agency
<b>EPD</b>	Environmental Protection Division
<b>ETA</b>	Equitable Target Areas
<b>FAST</b>	Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act
<b>FHWA</b>	Federal Highway Administration
<b>FTA</b>	Federal Transit Administration
<b>GDOT</b>	Georgia Department of Transportation
<b>GRTA</b>	Georgia Regional Transportation Authority
<b>HST</b>	Human Services Transportation
<b>ITS</b>	Intelligent Transportation System
<b>LCI</b>	Livable Centers Initiative
<b>LEP</b>	Limited English Proficiency
<b>MARTA</b>	Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority
<b>MPA</b>	Metropolitan Planning Area
<b>MPO</b>	Metropolitan Planning Organization
<b>POP</b>	Program of Projects
<b>RC</b>	Regional Commissions
<b>RTC</b>	Regional Transit Committee
<b>RTP</b>	Regional Transportation Plan
<b>STIP</b>	Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
<b>SRTA</b>	State Road and Tollway Authority
<b>TAMG</b>	Transportation Access and Mobility Group
<b>TAQC</b>	Transportation and Air Quality Committee
<b>TCC</b>	Transportation Coordinating Committee
<b>TDM</b>	Transportation Coordinating Committee
<b>TMA</b>	Transportation Demand Management
<b>TIP</b>	Transportation Improvement Program
<b>TOS</b>	Transit Operators Subcommittee
<b>UPWP</b>	Unified Planning Work Program
<b>USDOT</b>	U.S. Department of Transportation

## The Atlanta Regional Commission is Planning for Our Future

Whether you are zipping along an express lane on I-75, navigating a transfer at MARTA's Five Points Station, biking along the Atlanta Beltline, taking a morning run along the Silver Comet Trail, or awaiting a shipment of the latest new gadget, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is working behind the scenes to help you move around and get the things you need.

As the regional commission and metropolitan planning organization for the Atlanta metro region, ARC's job is to develop, plan, and facilitate a regionally significant, locally relevant, and future-focused transportation vision. Working in a comprehensive fashion, ARC incorporates aspects of transportation, community development, water resources, aging & health services, and workforce development into all of its planning work. Continuous collaboration with communities, elected officials, advocates, subject matter experts, local leaders, and interested parties is the foundation upon which this comprehensive planning happens.

On any given day, you can join ARC for a conversation about rapid technological advancements in transportation, discuss the region's growing and changing population, find out exactly how travel patterns were impacted by a recent event, learn about the latest trends in green infrastructure, or have a face-to-face meeting with your county commissioner. In this way, ARC serves as a regional convener and a collaborative hub.

The following pages of this guide to Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Basics outline how ARC serves as the MPO for Atlanta and the functions of regional transportation planning.



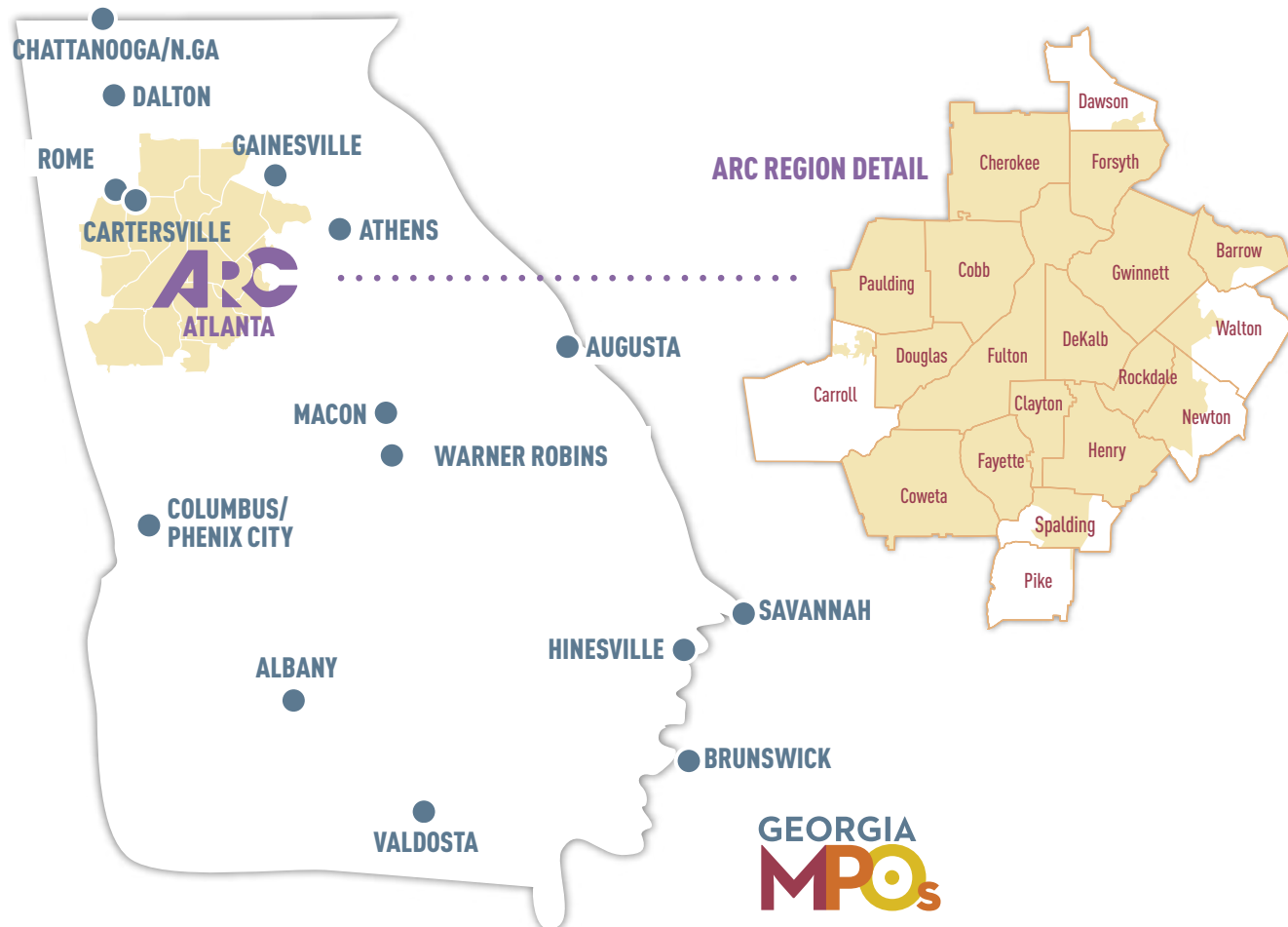
## What is a Metropolitan Planning Organization?

A Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO, is an organization designated by federal law to provide local officials and residents input into the planning and implementation of projects funded with federal transportation dollars for metropolitan areas with populations of greater than 50,000.

To receive federal aid, an urban area of this size must follow the federal metropolitan planning process outlined by the US Department of Transportation (USDOT). The MPO is responsible for carrying out this process. In the Atlanta metropolitan area, the Atlanta Regional Commission is the federally-designated MPO.

There are currently 16 MPOs in the state of Georgia. These are all areas with a population greater than 50,000, as defined by the U.S. Census.

**i** It is the job of an MPO to develop a regional transportation vision, direct planning, allocate federal funds, and engage the public and other stakeholders in this process.



## The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC)

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is responsible for carrying out the metropolitan planning process in all or parts of a 20-county area in the metro region. (All of 13 counties, parts of 7 counties)

ARC must implement a comprehensive, coordinated, and continuous transportation planning process, as outlined by the federal transportation act, Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act.

ARC acts as a regional forum to address transportation and air quality issues. It is a policy-making organization made up of representatives from local governments and transportation authorities.

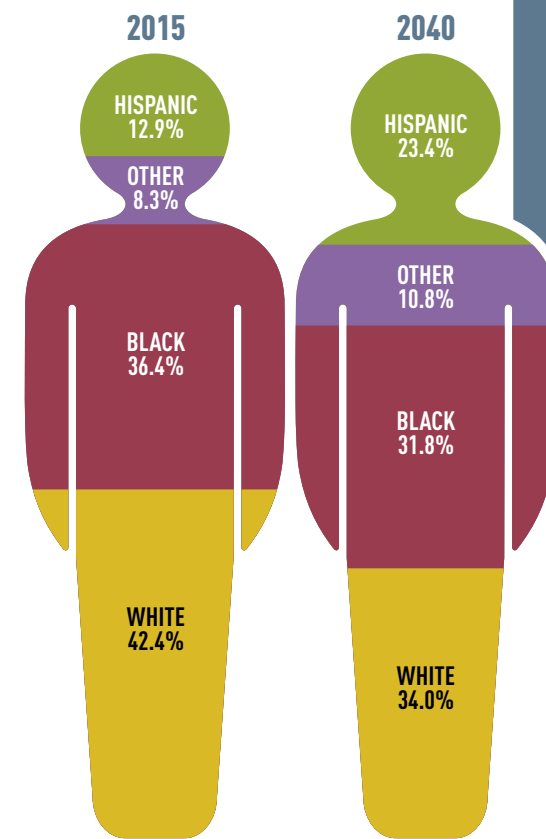
Approximately 50% of Georgia's population is represented through the ARC.

**i** **Population and Employment Trends**

In the next 20+ years, ARC forecasts the Atlanta region will add 2.5 million people and 1.5 million jobs. Much of the population growth will occur in existing suburbs. However, significant growth is also expected in the region's core as an increasing number of people choose to live near jobs and/or transit.

<b>POPULATION</b>	2015	2040
	5.5 MILLION	8 MILLION
<b>JOB</b>	2015	2040
	2.5 MILLION	4 MILLION

The Atlanta region is experiencing a major demographic shift as Baby Boomers age and lifespans increase. By 2030, one in five residents will be over the age of 60, compared to one in ten in 2010. As our region grows older, it also is becoming much more diverse, with minority groups making up the majority of the metro area's population.



## Cleaner Air Improves Public Health and Quality of Life

The quality of the Atlanta region’s air impacts public health and overall quality of life. Because vehicle emissions are a significant contributor to air pollution, air quality is a major consideration in the region’s transportation planning.

The Atlanta region must meet air quality standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that increase over time. These standards focus on two primary pollutants: ozone, a gas that forms in the atmosphere from tailpipe emissions, smokestacks and other sources; and particulate matter, tiny bits of particles in the air produced by car and truck exhaust, power plants, manufacturing facilities and other sources.

### Air Quality and Transportation Planning



ARC pays special attention to air quality regulations as a part of the transportation planning process. To qualify for federal transportation funds, the region must prove that it “conforms” to federal air quality standards.

This is achieved by prioritizing transportation projects that improve congestion or provide alternative commuting options, such as transit or bike lanes.

The U.S. Department of Transportation, along with the EPA, reviews the region’s transportation plan to determine whether it conforms to air quality standards. If it does not, federal transportation funds could be withheld from the region.

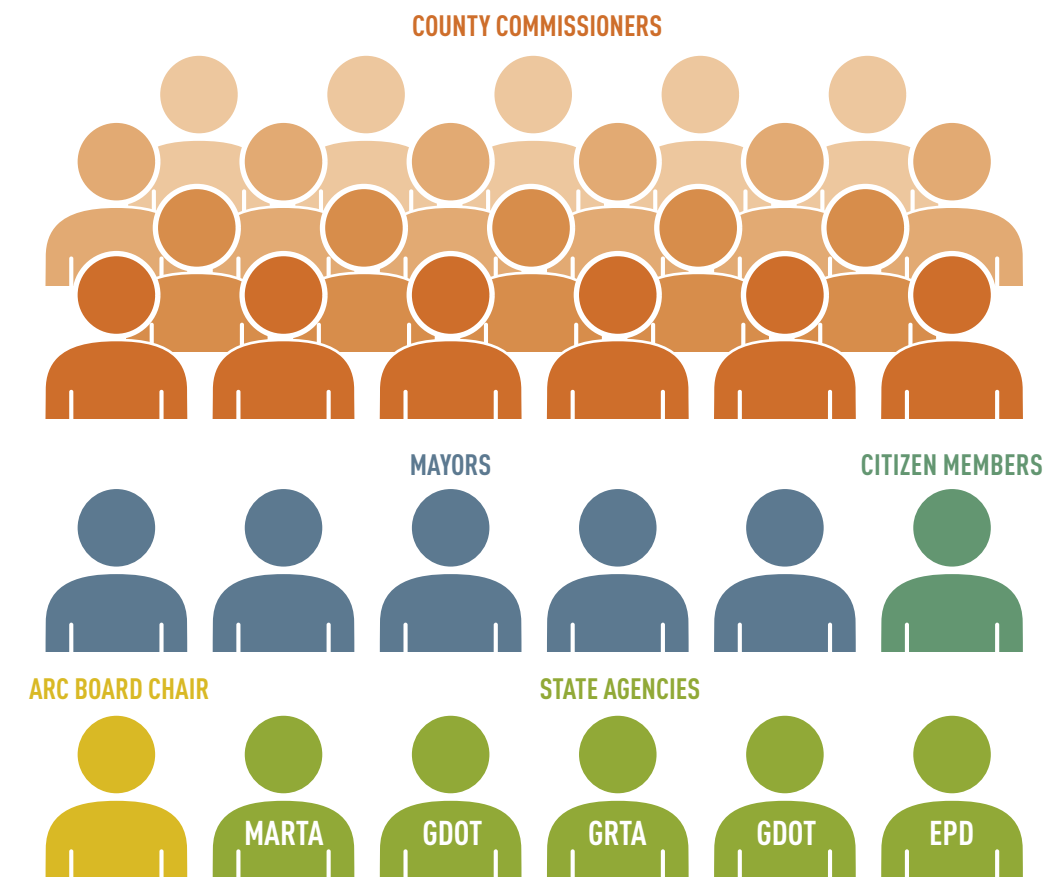
The Atlanta Region’s Plan is the latest iteration of the regional plan prepared by ARC. Whenever major changes are made to transportation projects and programs, the associated Regional Transportation Plan requires a new conformity determination, which is the process that ARC undertakes to prove whether the total anticipated emissions from all projects in the plan will meet air quality standards.

To further commit to clean air, ARC has developed tools to assess the impact of transportation congestion on air quality.  
[atlantaregional.org/air](http://atlantaregional.org/air)



## ARC Transportation Planning Committee Structure

The regional transportation decision making process is conducted through discussion, guidance, review, and approval of an official committee structure and also supported by the use of advisory groups on focused topic areas:



Graphic above is a general representation of membership and is not exact

**The Transportation and Air Quality Committee (TAQC)** is the MPO Policy Committee and consists of elected and appointed officials from a variety of entities. Decisions made by TAQC then move to the ARC Board for approval.

**Membership:** County Commissioners • ARC Board Chair • Mayor of Atlanta • Board Members – MARTA, GDOT, GRTA • GDOT Planning Director • Georgia EPD Representative • Additional Discretionary Membership - Mayors • Citizen District Members • DCA Representative

**The Regional Transit Committee (RTC)** has a lead role in providing transit planning input to the MPO and includes:

**Membership:** County Commissioners • Mayor of Atlanta • Board Chairs – ARC, MARTA, GRTA • GDOT Board Member • Metro Atlanta Mayors Association Representative • Executive Directors – ARC, GRTA, MARTA

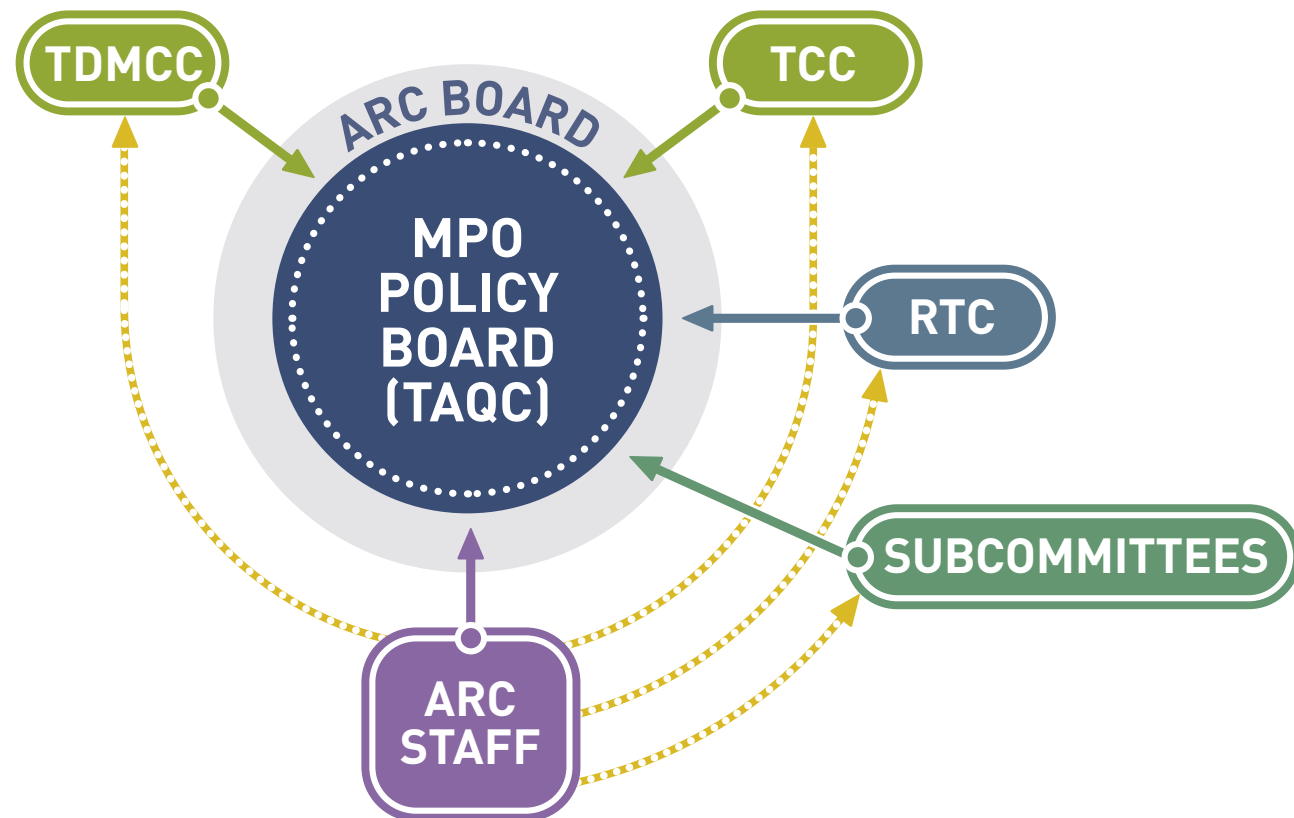


## ARC Committee Structure (cont.)

There are technical committees known as the [Transportation Coordinating Committee \(TCC\)](#) and the [Transportation Demand Management Coordinating Committee \(TDM CC\)](#).

The Transportation Coordinating Committee includes staff from the organizations represented on TAQC. Primarily, the development of the regional transportation plan and associated technical analysis is conducted by planners and analysts on staff at ARC, through a highly collaborative process with local, state, and federal planning staff, elected officials, and other public participants. Recommendations from this ongoing, collaborative process are made to the Transportation Coordinating Committee who then advise up to the policy makers elected to serve on the Regional Transit Committee and Transportation and Air Quality Committee. Once a formal decision to approve, edit, or deny a plan or programmatic decision is made by TAQC, the process continues on to the ARC Board, and then to GRTA who takes action on the TIP/RTP on behalf of the Governor.

The TDM Coordinating Committee is comprised of TDM professionals and staff from government and employer partners. The primary goal is to convene the region on TDM-related issues and projects that serve to reduce congestion, better air quality and improve overall quality of life for the 20-county maintenance area, specifically the non-attainment areas. Focal areas include alternative transportation modes, transportation technology and innovation and best practice policies and standards that serve to reduce SOV drivers in the region.



## Planning Requirements and Work Products

The Atlanta Regional Commission must meet the requirements of the Metropolitan Planning Regulations and other applicable federal or state laws. The federal laws are outlined in the latest surface transportation bill, currently, the FAST Act.

These requirements include three key products:

### [Regional Transportation Plan \(RTP\) - The Atlanta Region's Plan](#)

#### Long range - 20+ year plan

This plan is a long-range blueprint that prioritizes spending on transportation projects over the next two decades. It is financially constrained (based on revenue forecasts); multi-modal (transit, roads, freight, active transportation, human services transportation, etc.); and addresses regional air quality standards. Any transportation project that receives federal funding must be in both the RTP and the TIP.

### [Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#)

#### Short range - 6 year plan

Projects included in the TIP cover the first six years of the RTP. The TIP is the means by which federal, state, and local funds are approved for all significant surface transportation projects and programs in the 20-county Atlanta region.

### [Unified Planning Work Program \(UPWP\)](#)

#### Annual

The UPWP is developed annually in cooperation with the state, local governments, and public transportation operators. It documents metropolitan transportation planning activities performed with federal, state, and local transportation funds in the 20-county Atlanta region.

#### Additional Plans and Studies

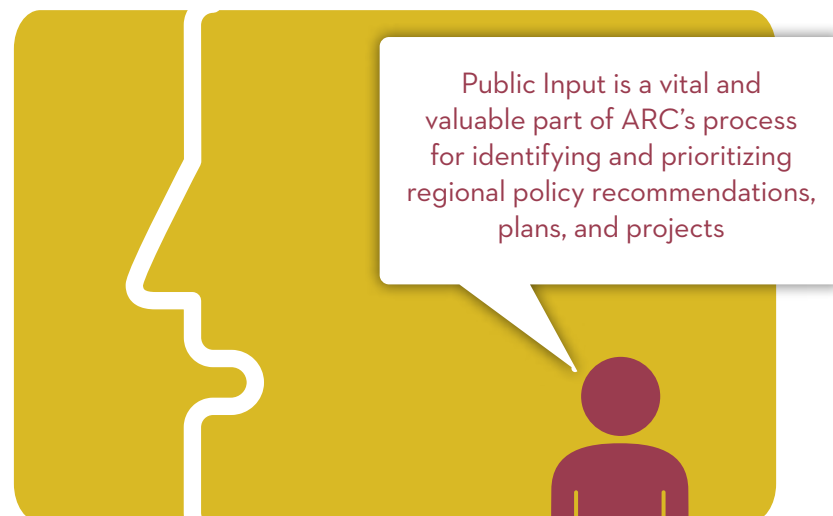
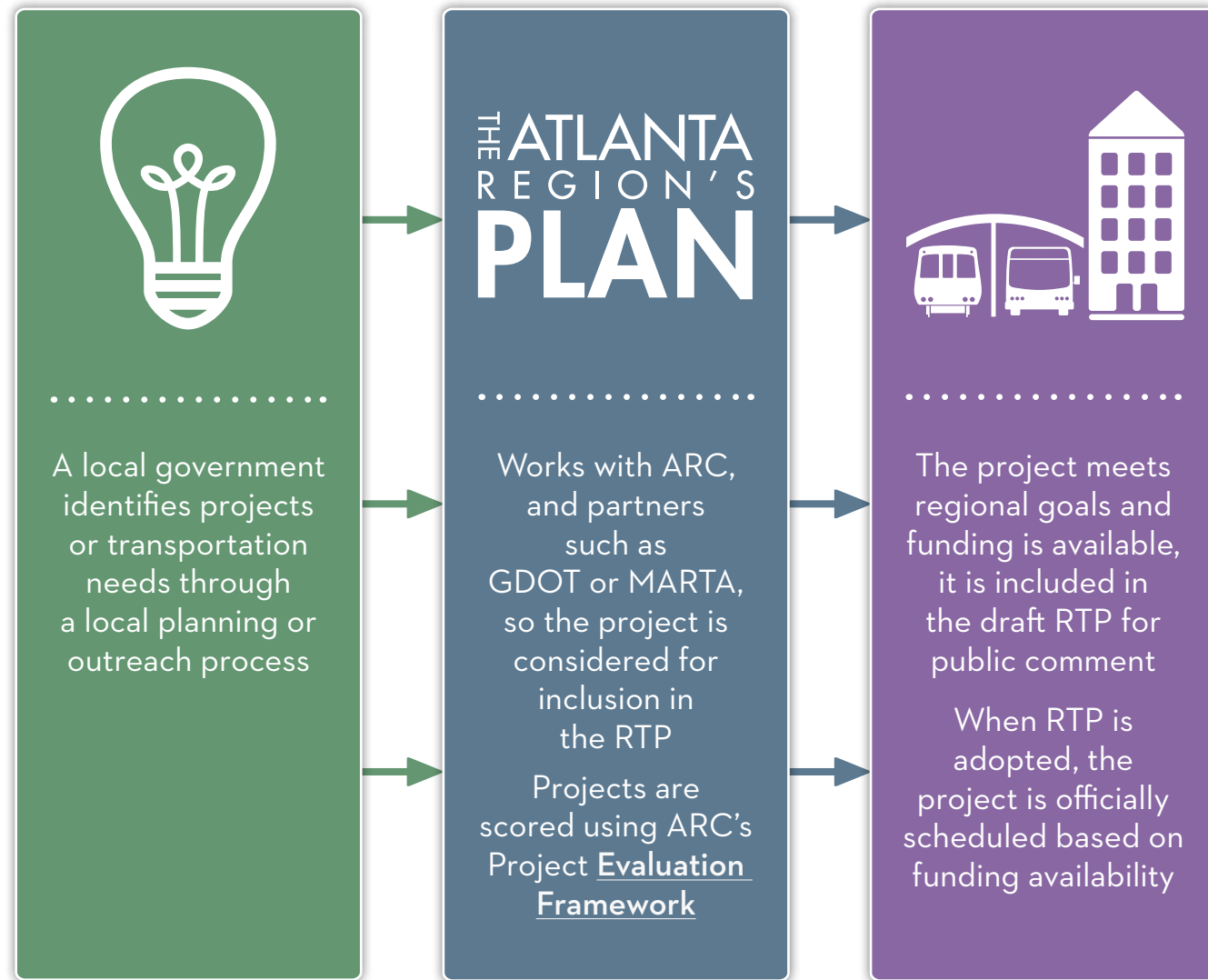
ARC produces many other modal plans, studies, and reports that inform the development of the RTP. It also provides insight to the latest trends, most up-to-date data, and general guidance for advancing the quality of planning in the Atlanta region.

A few examples include,

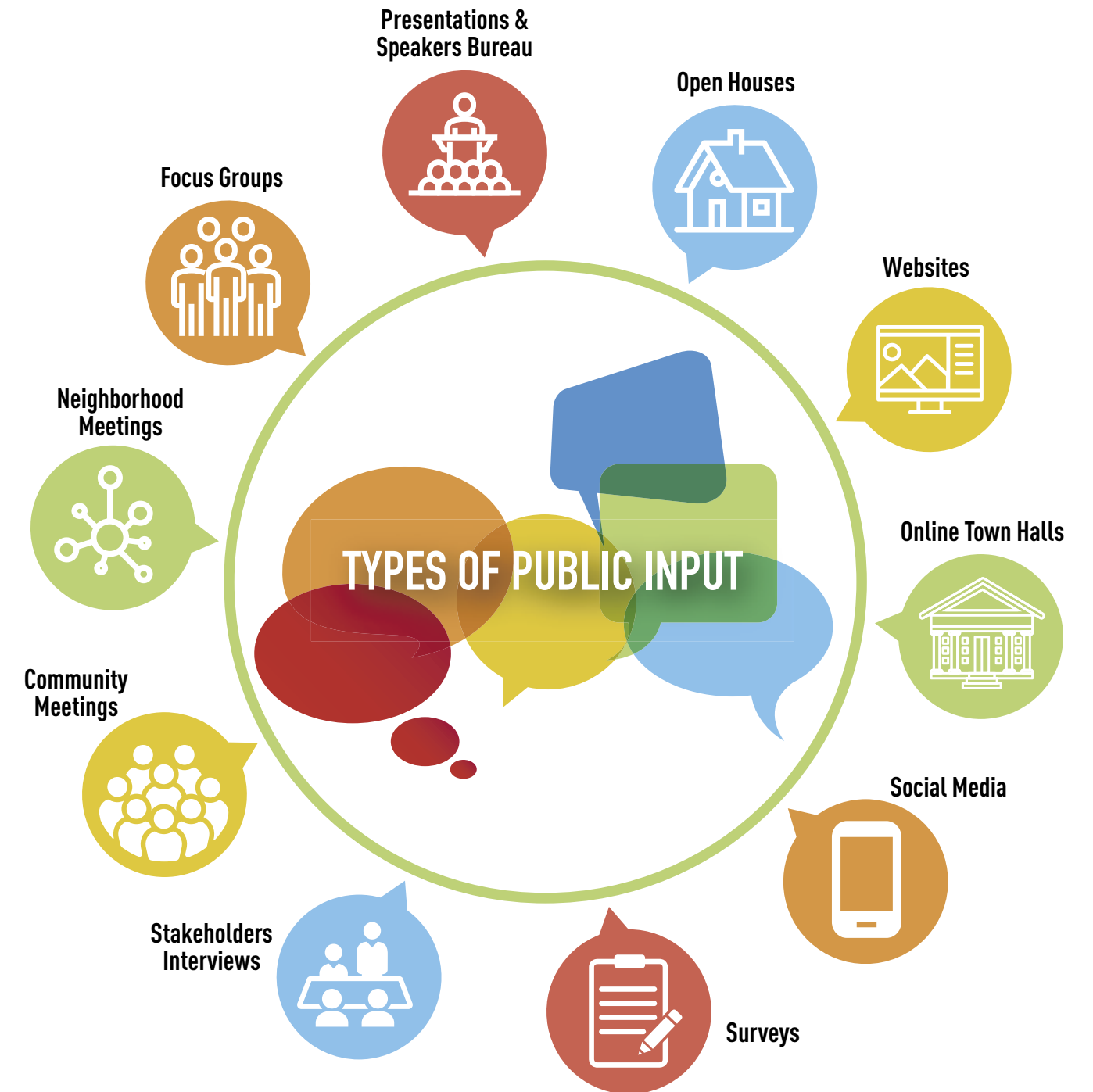
- *Walk. Bike. Thrive!* An award-winning, regional bicycle-pedestrian plan
- *Atlanta Regional Freight Mobility Plan*
- *Managing Mobility in the Atlanta Region*, ARC's human services transportation plan
- And many others, being updated on a regular basis – check out ARC's website, [www.atlantaregional.org](http://www.atlantaregional.org) for more information.



## How Transportation Projects are Identified



## Public Input is Critical to ARC's Activities Every Step of the Way



More information about how ARC conducts community engagement in the regional transportation planning process is available in the following companion document:

Regional Transportation Community Engagement Plan: Community Engagement Values, Techniques and Process



**Atlanta Regional Commission**

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