



NEW ORLEANS REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY'S NEW PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY

Outline and Comments by Ride New Orleans

RTA Title VI and Environmental Justice Policy Manual Public Meeting Notice:

When: Wednesday, April 10, 2013 at 6:00 PM

Where: RTA Building, 2817 Canal Street, New Orleans, LA 70119

Getting there: Accessible from the Canal Streetcar and #94 Broad Bus

What is the RTA's New Policy Manual?

The RTA's Title VI and Environmental Justice Policy Manual was established to ensure that the social equity and environmental impacts of major bus and streetcar service changes under consideration by the agency are fully understood and to provide the public with more opportunities to get involved in transportation decision-making.

All transit agencies must adopt Title VI and environmental justice guidelines due to new requirements put in place by the United States Federal Transit Administration.

You can find out more here:

- [Executive Summary](#)
 - [Full Policy Manual](#)
 - [RTA Public Notice](#)
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Why is the Policy Manual Important?

The policy manual establishes a new public engagement process on changes to the RTA service with the goal of reducing negative impacts to low-income and minority populations. This is the first time the RTA has established a formal policy on public engagement.

According to the RTA, the policy manual seeks to:

1. Ensure that transportation service is available and accessible for every person, regardless of their race, color or national origin
2. Identify and limit negative impacts on human health and the environmental – including social and economic effects of major service changes on minority and low-income populations
3. Create more opportunities for riders to participate in transportation decision-making
4. Prevent denial, reduction, or delay in major service change benefits to minority or low-income populations

5. To ensure that those riders with limited understanding of English have equal access to information.
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What does it mean for my bus / streetcar commute?

The RTA will be required to hold public meetings and conduct new social equity and environmental justice analyses any time the agency proposes a major service changes impacting minority transit routes.

The RTA defines a major service change as:

- Any change of more than 25% of the revenue hours (aka hours that a bus or streetcar line is accepting passengers) or route miles (aka the distance the route travels) on a given transit route
- Any change to the span of service on a given transit route of 2 hours or more
- The introduction of any new transit route
- The discontinuation of a route or portion of a route with no alternative service within ¼ mile

The RTA defines the following transit lines as minority:

- 10 Tchoupitoulas
 - 15 Freret
 - 16 Claiborne
 - 27 Louisiana
 - 28 Martin Luther King
 - 32 Leonidas
 - 39 Tulane 94 Broad
 - 47 Canal Streetcar - Cemeteries
 - 51 St. Bernard - Paris Ave
 - 52 St. Bernard - St Anthony
 - 55 Elysian Fields
 - 57 Franklin
 - 60 Hayne
 - 62 Morrison Express
 - 64 Lake Forest Express
 - 80 Louisa
 - 84 Galvez
 - 88 St. Claude/Jackson Barracks
 - 91 Jackson-Esplanade
 - 94 Broad
 - 101 Algiers Loop
 - 102 General Meyer
 - 108 Algiers Local
 - 114 General DeGaulle Sullen
 - 115 General DeGaulle Tullis
 - 201 Kenner Loop
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Our suggestions to make this new policy stronger

While the RTA's plan is a step in the right direct, Ride New Orleans would like to see increased rider representation, and transparency in decision making by the RTA board and Veolia. Ride will submit the following comments to the RTA as they consider adoption of this policy.

1. Public Participation Plan

- **Public Notices**
 - Public notices for the meeting should include the addition of:
 - An executive summary of the changes proposed
 - A summary of the impacts identified in the social equity and environmental justice analyses

- Public notices should be designed to be easy to understand with the critical information (who, what, where, when, why) designed to be easy to locate on the notice and written in language that can be understood at a 4th grade reading level.
- Public notices placed on the RTA's website should be prominently featured on the main page and lead to individual, topical information pages on the proposed service changes. The important relevant information about the meeting should be posted directly onto the individual, topical public notice page. The only information that should be relayed via downloadable links are those files too large to post directly onto the website. Currently, public notice materials are placed at the very bottom of the "Service Updates" web page changed buried under other text and updates and included only as a link to a .pdf file instead of directly on the website.
- The RTA should establish a procedure by which community and stakeholder groups and individuals can sign up to join the list to receive email blasts regarding public notices.
- For every major service change, the RTA should draft a press release to circulate to all local print, web and radio media outlets summarizing the service changes, the public meeting date, time and location, and impacts identified in the social equity and environmental justice analyses.

- **Public Meetings**

- Public meetings should be scheduled during after work hours or on weekends and located at transit accessible meeting locations.
- Childcare and language translation services should be provided at public meetings.
- In addition to one central public meeting, the RTA should conduct outreach at heavily travelled bus and streetcar stops along the lines impacted by proposed major service changes.

2. Minority Representation on Committees and Councils

- **RTA Board Committees**

- An analysis of the minority representation of the RTA Board Committees should be included in the policy manual.
- The RTA Board Committees and member should be posted online / made known publicly.
- RTA Board Committee meetings should be made public meetings and noticed and advertised as such.

- **Riders Advisory Committee**

- The RTA typically only solicits comments from riders when a major service change is planned. The RTA should create opportunities for riders to participate in a more proactive fashion soliciting input prior to the development of major service changes. Many transit agencies across the country appoint riders to a Riders Advisory Committee, empowering riders to have more influence on investments in transit service.

3. Environmental Justice and Social Equity Analyses

- **RTA Board Approval of Projects With Disproportionate Adverse Effects**

- The policy manual states: "If the analysis concludes a compelling public need that cannot be satisfied by an alternative, the agency may proceed with the proposed project, even if disproportionate adverse affects have been identified." This should not be a staff / Veolia judgment call. The RTA Board should be required to vote at a public meeting to proceed with a project that has disproportionate adverse affects.

- **Timing of Release of Social Equity and Environmental Justice Analyses**

- It is unclear from the policy manual at what stage in the process an environmental justice analysis is conducted. Does it take place prior to the public meetings? Will the report and its findings be made available for public review before, during or after the public meetings? Ride believes that the reports should be prepared and disseminated in advance of the public meetings to ensure that riders have the adequate time to review the findings and provide feedback to the RTA.
- **Format of Analyses.**
 - A template of the analyses should be included in the policy manual.
 - An executive summary written in plain language at a 4th grade reading level should accompany the release of every analysis.

4. Other Comments

- **Title IV Report**
 - The maps are not legible in the document. Full page maps should be included. Further explanation of the transit routes clipped by minority census blocks on page 18 should be provided.
- **Documentation of Public Engagement**
 - All but two of the community outreach events listed in 2011 and 2012 are the Mayor's budget listening tour meetings. While there was likely a RTA representative in attendance at the meeting, RTA service was not the focus of the meeting – the city's budget was. Therefore, these meetings should not be credited toward RTA public engagement. To leave these meetings in the document misrepresents the amount of community outreach the agency has conducted over the past couple of years.
 - Additionally, the District D meeting for August 27, 2012 was rescheduled because that was the day that Hurricane Isaac hit. Listing this date is inaccurate.