

# Maumee Valley Planning Organization

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

2024



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The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed are not necessarily those of the Ohio Department of Transportation. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

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# **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Foundation of Public Participation in Transportation Planning**

Public participation is based on the belief that people whose lives are affected by transportation planning and investment decisions have a right to be involved in the decision-making process and influence choices that are made. Directly engaging citizens in this process yields diverse voices and new ideas, promotes successful problem-solving, and gives the public a sense of ownership of the developed solutions.

Public participation must be a proactive process in which governing bodies strive to find innovative ways to identify and engage the affected public, provide a wide variety of opportunities for interested parties to become involved, and create a meaningful process that is transparent and ensures effective communication about how public contribution influences decisions. It is also important that the public participation process be continuously evaluated and improved to ensure best practices are being followed.

**The Maumee Valley Planning Organization (MVPO) is committed to a public participation process that:**

- Involves the public in decisions that affect their lives.
- Ensures that the public's contribution will influence decision-making.
- Communicates how the public's contribution will influence decisions.
- Is adaptable and sensitive to diverse audiences.
- Promotes respect.
- Provides equal access to opportunities, information, and education.
- Ensures timely response to participants.
- Is consistent and reliable.
- Promotes continued engagement.
- Maintains honesty and integrity throughout the process.
- Continuously strives to educate and inform affected and interested parties to give them a more meaningful participatory experience.
- Encourages early and active participation.
- Involves process evaluation and monitoring tools.
- Ensures full and fair public participation for all affected parties.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND & PURPOSE**

### **2.1 MVPO Background**

The Maumee Valley Planning Organization (MVPO) is a voluntary association of local governments organized as a regional planning commission under the Ohio Revised Code Section 713.21. The agency serves the counties of Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Paulding, and Williams, which includes 4 cities, 36 villages, and 61 townships. The total area has a combined population of approximately 165,000 people.

MVPO was established in 1973 and is funded through administration and implementation funds that are provided through successful grants secured for grantees, as well as member dues provided by the Board of County Commissioners for each county in the planning region. As each member county pays membership fees, all entities within the five counties are eligible for assistance provided by the organization.

MVPO provides a full range of services for housing, economic development, downtown revitalization, and general community development. On behalf of the local units of government, MVPO makes applications for and administers various grant programs available through the Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA) and other state and federal programs. MVPO also serves as the District 5 Liaison for the Ohio Public Works Commission's State Capital Improvement Program and the Local Transportation Improvement Program. In 2013, MVPO added transportation planning to its existing planning services as a result of the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) program initiated by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). MVPO is now designated as the region's RTPO and has taken an active role in transportation planning for the five-county area.

As an RTPO, MVPO provides the region with technical services, as well as general transportation planning expertise, and strives to be an overall transportation resource for all entities in the area. The overarching goal of the RTPO is to further transportation projects in the region and accomplish the long-range goals and objectives established in MVPO's transportation plan.

### **2.2 Purpose of the Participation Plan**

The purpose of the MVPO Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to outline the standard procedures that will be followed to ensure proactive public involvement during all transportation planning processes through the RTPO Program. It is the policy of MVPO to have a public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, and full public access to MVPO activities at all key stages of decision-making relating to transportation planning. This plan specifies MVPO's underlying goals, as well as strategies and techniques to be considered and employed in achieving those goals. The importance of environmental justice is described, as well as the methodology for identifying these areas of concern, and provides a framework for including it as part of the public involvement process.

### **3.0 LEGAL FRAMEWORK & PLAN APPLICATION**

The MVPO PPP provides a framework for efforts focused on identifying, seeking, and engaging populations that have traditionally been underserved by existing transportation systems, including minority populations, low-income populations, non-English speakers, those with limited English proficiency (LEP), older persons, and persons with disabilities.

These policies are outlined in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:

*"...No person in the United States shall, on the basis of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program receiving Federal financial assistance..."*

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000)

Further framework supporting these efforts was established in the President's 1994 Executive Order on Environmental Justice, which states:

*"...Each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations..."*

- Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Population, 1994

The federal Transportation Act, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) was signed into law on December 4, 2015. The Act reauthorizes the Federal-aid highway program through fiscal year 2020. The FAST Act is the successor to MAP-21, which was enacted in 2012 and builds on the changes outlined in that legislation. The FAST Act continues the previous act's commitment to public participation with the requirements for metropolitan planning organizations to provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan.

Others include:

- MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act) effective October 2012.
- Federal Highway Administration Order in 1998.
- The Department of Transportation issued Departmental Order 5610.2(a) (Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations). This Order updates the Department's original Environmental Justice Order 12898. The Order continues to be a key component of the Department's strategy to promote the principles of environmental justice in all departmental programs, policies, and activities.
- US Department of Transportation Order in 1997.
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- Age Discrimination Act of 1975
- The Freedom of Information Act

In addition to carrying out these required elements of the PPP, MVPO shall, to the maximum extent practicable:

- Hold all public participation activities at convenient and accessible locations, including handicap-accessible, and convenient times.
- Employ visualization techniques to aid in the description and explanation of all items relating to transportation planning.
- Make public information available in electronically accessible formats, as well as hard copy formats to afford reasonable opportunity for consideration of public information.
- Provide sufficient time and opportunity for all interested parties to comment on the contents of all transportation plans and programs and provide a response to all applicable public input.
- Employ a variety of public involvement techniques throughout the planning process to offer a variety of ways to engage all interested parties.
- Periodically review, revise, and update this plan to ensure a successful public participation process.

## **4.0 COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

MVPO has two committees that oversee program activities while providing input and guidance to MVPO staff members. Throughout the transportation planning process, these committees meet, at a minimum, quarterly and all committee meetings are free and open to the public. Additional meetings are scheduled on a needs basis and all meetings generally last one-to-two hours. For a list of all committee members, see Appendix 3.

### Executive Council

MVPO's Executive Council, upon recommendations from the Technical Committee, is responsible for the final review and adoption of all RTPO planning documents. This council meets quarterly on the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of the month and a quorum shall consist of 1/3 of all representatives (5) and at least 3 counties must be represented. The Executive Council provides overall coordination of planning efforts, policies, and procedures in addition to input and guidance for all program activities through the RTPO program. The council reviews and approves recommendations from the Technical Committee and then provides recommendations for plans, policies, and procedures. One commissioner from each county in the MVPO region serves on this council, as well as representatives from cities, villages, townships, and private businesses located in the region.

### Technical Committee

The Transportation Technical Committee provides specific technical input on transportation planning topics, such as materials, input, construction or engineering techniques, and other detail-related information that is important to the planning process. It provides oversight and manages transportation planning and implementation, as well as reviews technical planning efforts and procedures, public input comments, and recommendations. The Technical Committee provides recommendations to the Executive Council for their review and approval.



## **5.0 GOALS FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Significant and ongoing public involvement in the transportation planning process is the goal of MVPO. Education and public outreach are essential parts of fulfilling this desire and responsibility to successfully inform the public. In addition to its informative roles, MVPO also seeks to empower and improve opportunities for the public to voice their ideas and values regarding transportation. MVPO strives to ensure early and continuous public involvement in all major actions and decisions through the RTPO program.

The following five goals embody these ideas and guide the participation process to successfully achieve the principles that have been outlined:

### **Goal 1: Inform and Educate the Public**

- Make information accessible to the public and provide timely public notice.
- Provide information to the public that is accurate, understandable, and pertinent to transportation planning.
- Utilize engagement activities using varied communication tools.
- Educate the public about the planning process and provide supportive policy, program, and technical information.

### **Goal 2: Encourage Participation of the Underserved and Underrepresented**

- Increase the diversity and number of participants in engagement activities through building new relationships with organizations and communities that serve underrepresented populations.
- These groups include minority, non-English speaking, and low-income populations.

### **Goal 3: Engage the Public and Encourage Continued Participation**

- Ensure an engagement process that is meaningful.
- Provide various ways to engage and communicate with the public.
- Respond to all comments and questions in a timely manner.
- Present a clear process for incorporating public input into MVPO's plans.
- Provide other opportunities for further engagement and education.
- Actively involve the public in all key transportation decisions throughout the planning process.

**Goal 4:  
Use Input to Shape  
Plan, Policies, and  
Programs**

- Document all input received from the public.
- Record of received comments will assist MVPO staff and committees in the development of plans and programs.
- Transparent process of incorporating public input into transportation planning documents.
- Inform the public about each public input planning activity.
- Present opportunities at the beginning of each planning activity throughout the process.

**Goal 5:  
Evaluate Public  
Participation  
Strategies**

- Sustain best practice in public participation by continuing to monitor the public involvement process.
- Create a framework for evaluating and improving this document and the strategies that guide engaging the public.

## **6.0 INTERESTED PARTIES**

Reference is made several times in this document to interested parties. This term refers to any individual or group concerned with or affected by the activities of MVPO through the RTPO program. Listed below are the interested parties that MVPO plans to engage throughout the transportation planning process.

Interested parties:

- Agencies on aging
- Agriculture/farming
- Air-ambulance associations
- Airport authorities
- Ambulance associations
- Automobile associations
- Bicycle and trail interests
- Citizens
- Citizen groups
- Community action organizations
- County partnerships
- Economic development agencies
- Emergency management
- Environment agencies
- Fire departments
- Freight shippers and providers of freight transportation services
- Highway heritage corridors
- Local elected officials
- Local planning commissions
- Municipal engineers
- Municipalities
- Private providers of transportation
- Public transportation employees
- Representatives of the disabled
- School districts
- Trucking agencies
- Users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities
- Users of public transportation
- Other interested parties

## **7.0 STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES**

A variety of strategies and techniques will be used to encourage early and continuous public participation throughout the development of MVPO's core plans through the RTPPO program, such as the Long-Range Transportation Plan. As new roles related to transportation planning are federally mandated and incorporated into MVPO's responsibilities as an RTPPO, MVPO will continue to apply community engagement techniques to accomplish the goals outlined in this plan.

MVPO's planning activities and programs through the RTPPO program, including those for the purposes of public engagement, must be sensitive to the region's diverse audience. MVPO ensures that no person will, on the grounds of race, religion, age, gender, disability, national origin, or economic status, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity. MVPO also promotes the full and fair participation of all affected populations in the transportation decision-making process. Any information, education, and participation opportunities will be equally accessible.

### **Goal 1: Inform and Educate the Public**

- **Visualization**
  - Visualization techniques include charts, maps, the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), diagrams, tables, and photos to aid in the illustration of ideas and concepts represented in transportation plans, projects, and programs. Tailoring visualization techniques for a specific document or population will help all interested parties understand transportation planning goals and activities.
  
- **Website**
  - MVPO's website, [www.mvpo.org](http://www.mvpo.org), hosts a variety of information on all aspects of the transportation planning process and can provide interactive activities to solicit feedback from the public. While the internet is an effective tool, MVPO recognizes that not all citizens have access to or the ability to use it. Thus, MVPO will also use traditional forms of public outreach, meaning all forms that do not require the use of the internet, such as newsletters, news releases, and/or contact by telephone to ensure that broad avenues for participation are provided for all.
  - Display of documents: MVPO's core plans and published documents will be available in electronic format on the website.
  - Public comment opportunities: The MVPO website offers an easily identifiable place for public comment on MVPO items relating to transportation. When public comment is solicited throughout the planning process, MVPO will use the website as a tool to allow for easy public comment and collection of input.

- Public meetings, upcoming events, and meeting calendar: A calendar will display MVPO's regional transportation-related meetings and events that are open to the public. These meetings will be held at convenient times and facilities for all interested parties, including handicap-accessible locations.
- Public opinion surveys: As needed
- **Internet**
  - The internet is a dynamic tool that allows MVPO to reach a large cross-section of people at times conducive to their schedule. Those citizens who have access to the internet have access to web-based information 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Message boards, blogs, discussion forums, electronic mailing lists, and social networking sites can be used to educate, inform, and engage the public.
- **Publications and Mailings**
  - MVPO will use publications and mailings to inform all interested parties about transportation-related events and issues. Electronic forms of these publications will be made available on MVPO's website.
- **Information Displays and Booths**
  - MVPO will take advantage of events already taking place in the community, such as professional, college, and high school sporting events, community events, neighborhood association meetings, etc. to display information about the transportation planning process. This information can include surveys, mailing list sign-up forms, LRTP summaries, and more.

Goal 2: Encouraging Participation of Traditionally Underserved and Underrepresented Populations

MVPO recognizes that additional efforts must be taken to involve a broader portion of the population, including the disabled, ethnic, minority, and low-income populations. Environmental justice assures that services and benefits allow for meaningful participation and are distributed to avoid discrimination. More information about environmental justice can be found in Appendix 2.

- **Collaboration**
  - An effort should be made to collaborate with other organizations whenever possible. Examples of collaboration opportunities include working with other transportation agencies in advertising, recruiting elected public officials to be present at public meetings, or working with a retirement center to involve a particular segment of the population. Interaction will also occur between MVPO and other non-profit and government organizations.

- **Media**
  - Every effort should be made to use the media when involving the public. No single form will reach everyone, so it is recommended that MVPO use a variety of methods. MVPO should take advantage of opportunities with the media, therefore, press releases should be sent to radio, television, and local newspapers. Press releases, when appropriate, should include information about MVPO programs and activities, briefings, interviews, upcoming events, and actions, as well as whom to contact as a regional resource for more information.

Goal 3: Engage the Public and Encourage Continued Participation

- **Public Interaction**
  - Involving the public through face-to-face interaction is an effective way to educate people about transportation-planning activities and help the public to be engaged in the process. MVPO will attempt to meet the public where they are using the following strategies:
  - PUBLIC MEETINGS & HEARINGS: Public meetings can be used to inform the public while simultaneously soliciting ideas, feedback, and input.
  - INVOLVING PARTICIPANTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: MVPO will be responsible for involving and providing meaningful access to the benefits, services, information, and other important portions of its RTPO programs and activities for individuals who are considered limited English proficient (LEP). LEP persons are individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. MVPO will provide translated documents for major work products and a translator can be provided upon request.

MVPO will encourage the public to ask questions, voice their opinions and ideas, and comment on RTPO activities at any time throughout the transportation planning process.

All comments will be evaluated and documented by MVPO staff and incorporated where possible.

Goal 4: Use Input to Shape Policies, Plans, and Programs

- **Document and Incorporate Public Input**
  - MVPO will document all input received that applies to transportation planning, policies, and programs, as well as other planning processes, including environmental, in the LRTP. The input received will be used as a guide in planning activities by MVPO. Comments will be considered for incorporation and will be presented to committees and taken into consideration during key decision-making. Response to comments will be given where appropriate, depending on the project for which input is solicited and the relevance of that input to the specific project.
  - Input will be solicited primarily using public opinion surveys for specific projects during the RTPO program. These surveys will be made available on MVPO's website, as well as in hard copies at all public meetings. Hard copies will also be always placed in public libraries for the public to complete during survey periods and return to MVPO at their convenience. The public may also provide input at any time by contacting members of MVPO's staff with comments, questions, and/or concerns.

## Goal 5: Evaluate Public Participation Strategies

- **Evaluation**

- MVPO will continually evaluate the public participation process to support the ongoing improvement of future processes and projects and improve the practice of public participation.
- Evaluation of individual public outreach events: MVPO will summarize and evaluate each public engagement event or activity at the end of each by documenting how successful the event/activity was. Evaluation will include such criteria as how many people attended, how many comments were received, and how the public's input influenced the final product.
- Evaluation of public participation techniques: Along with public participation event or activity evaluation, the specific technique employed at each event will also be evaluated by MVPO staff. MVPO staff will determine how effective each technique was in aiding the public to participate and revise each technique accordingly.
- Review of the Public Participation Plan: The Public Participation Plan will be reviewed every five years at a minimum. However, annual evaluation and revision will also occur as needed to ensure that best practices are continually being followed.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: Glossary**

**Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)** – Federal law that requires public facilities, including transportation services, to be fully accessible for persons with disabilities. ADA also requires the provision of complementary or supplemental paratransit services to persons with mental disabilities, temporary disabilities, and conditions related to substance abuse. The Act is an augmentation to, but does not supersede, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability against otherwise qualified individuals in programs receiving federal assistance.

**Community** - Individuals or groups of individuals who may live in the same area, and share a common background, interests, history, or economic-political interests.

**Environmental Justice** - is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

**Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** - Agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation that funds highway planning and programs.

**Federal Transit Administration (FTA)** - Agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation that funds transit planning and programs.

**Geographic Information System (GIS)** - A computer system capable of capturing, storing, analyzing, and displaying geographically referenced information; data identified according to location.

**Long Range** - In transportation planning, refers to a time span of more than five years.

**Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)** - A document resulting from a regional or statewide process of collaboration and consensus on a region's transportation system. This document serves as the defining vision for the region's transportation systems and services. In metropolitan areas, the plan indicates all the transportation improvement schedules for funding over the next 20 years.

**MAP-21, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (P.L. 112-141)** - Signed into law by President Obama on July 6, 2012. MAP-21 is the first long-term highway authorization enacted since 2005 and replaces SAFETEA-LU, the previous authorization statute.

**Mobility** - The ability to move or be moved from place to place.

**Mode, Intermodal, Multimodal** - Form of transportation, such as automobile, transit, bicycle, and walking. Intermodal refers to the connections between modes and multimodal refers to the availability of transportation within a system or corridor.

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** - Federal law passed in 1969 that requires an analysis of the environmental impacts of federal actions. An analysis is also required for the funding of projects.



**National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)** - Law requiring federal agencies to consider the potential effect of a project on a property that is registered on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. If effects are identified, federal and state agencies and the public must identify means to mitigate the harm.

**Outreach** - Efforts to offer everyone in a community the opportunity to participate in transportation planning.

**Public Comment** - Once a public involvement program is underway, public comment is the extensive information that begins to be gathered by the department representing the views of the public and interest groups.

**Public Involvement** - The process by which public concerns, needs, and values are solicited and incorporated into decision-making.

**Public Participation** - The active and meaningful involvement of the public in the development of transportation plans and improvement programs.

**Rural Planning Organization** - An organization similar to an MPO, composed of representatives of rural local governments and appointed representatives from the geographic area covered by the organization with the purpose of involving local officials in multi-modal transportation planning through a structured process.

**Stakeholder** - A person, community, or organization that has an interest in or may be affected by a transportation decision.

**Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT)** - The state agency responsible for transportation issues and planning in Ohio.

**Underserved Population** - Those belonging to a minority population or those of low-income. Definitions of minorities and minimum standards are set in the U.S. Decennial Census.

## Appendix 2: Environmental Justice

To identify environmental justice (EJ) areas of concern in the MVPO region, data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) data 2022 for median household income and minority information were utilized. The EJ areas of concern are typically determined by minority and low-income populations as defined in federal documents related to EJ, U.S. Decennial Censuses, and the ACS.

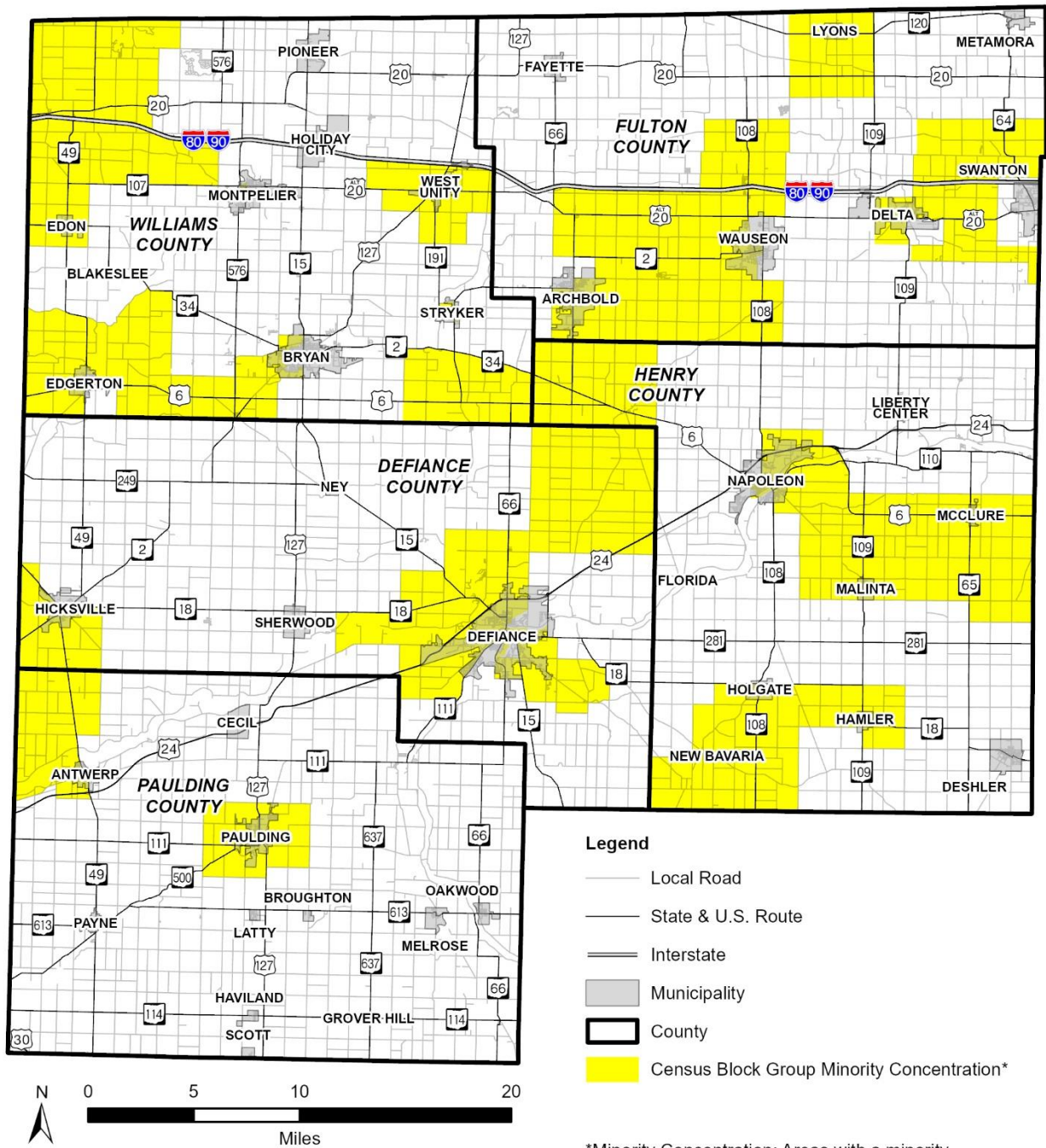
- **Low Income:** Refers to people in households where the median income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) poverty guidelines. – U.S. DOT/FTA Federal Guidance on Environmental Justice (Federal Register August 15, 2012). For MVPO's purposes, the poverty level for a family of four for the year 2022 was used, as defined by the HHS: \$27,750.
- **Minority Population:** Any readily identifiable group or groups of minority persons who live in geographic proximity, and geographically dispersed or transient persons who will be similarly affected by a proposed DOT program, policy, or activity. Minority includes persons who are American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander as identified in the U.S. DOT/FTA Federal Guidance on Environmental Justice (Federal Register August 15, 2012).

2020 U.S. Census block groups were utilized for analysis, as they provide more refined data and a colored map is used to demonstrate which block groups have been identified as areas of concern (page 19).

MVPO regional averages for minority populations were compared to the block groups that make up the region, as well as block groups with an average median household income at or below the 2022 poverty line. The regional average (percentage) of minority populations was 8.7%. Thus, any block group with a minority population greater than 8.7% was identified as a minority concentration.

EJ findings showed that many areas of minority concentrations exist in the MVPO, however, no areas with an average median household income exist below the 2022 poverty guidelines.

**Figure 1: Environmental Justice Areas of Concern by U.S. Census Block Groups (2022)**



Environmental justice areas of concern refer to geographic areas with a concentration of minority populations and/or low-income populations that may be disproportionately affected by environmental and health hazards.

Map Date: 3/27/2024  
 Sources: Ohio Department of Transportation, TIGER/Line 2023, U.S. Census Bureau

\*Minority Concentration: Areas with a minority population greater than the 2022 regional average (8.7%).

All census block groups had a higher median household income than the 2022 poverty threshold for a family of four (\$27,750).

### Appendix 3: Committees

#### **Maumee Valley Planning Organization Executive Council:**

David Kern, Chairman.....	Defiance County Commissioner
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Tod Schlachter.....	Williams County Township Association

#### **Rural Transportation Technical Committee:**

- City of Bryan Engineer
- City of Defiance Engineer
- City of Napoleon Engineer
- Defiance County Economic Development
- Defiance County Engineer
- FHWA Ohio Division
- Fulton County Economic Development Corporation
- Fulton County Engineer
- Henry County Community Improvement Corporation
- Henry County Engineer
- Henry County Planning Commission
- MVPO
- ODOT Central Office
- ODOT District 1
- ODOT District 2
- Paulding County Commissioners
- Paulding County Economic Development
- Paulding County Engineer
- Village of Archbold Engineer
- Williams County Economic Development Corporation
- Williams County Engineer