

PUBLIC MEETINGS/HEARINGS DURING DECLARED EMERGENCIES



The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable federal environmental laws for these projects are being, or have been, carried out by ODOT pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327 and a memorandum of understanding dated June 6, 2018, and executed by FHWA and ODOT.

Office of Environmental Services

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OHIO DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guidance is to provide information regarding the provisions and conditions for holding a virtual public meeting/hearing for NEPA purposes as a substitute for an in-person public meeting/hearing when the Governor of Ohio and/or President of the United States declares a health or other public emergency or when the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) determines that an in-person public meeting/hearing should not be held out of concern for public health or safety.

GUIDANCE

All public involvement requirements remain the same except that public meetings/hearings may be conducted virtually during these declared emergencies. Virtual public meetings/hearings may be conducted using a variety of methods, including but not limited to webinars, live meetings (such as PublicInput, social media, etc.), telephone town halls, etc. Please refer to the Virtual Public Involvement Folder in the Public Involvement Toolbox on the [OES Manuals, Guidance, and Forms website](#) for additional resources and information regarding conducting these type of meetings.

A virtual public meeting/hearing must include a presentation by the project management team, which includes both audio and visual components. The presentation may be pre-recorded and uploaded for viewing at the scheduled meeting time and thereafter.

Notification requirements remain the same; However, in addition to the existing requirements, a virtual public meeting/hearing notification must also include the following:

- A web address for project information and meeting materials
- Clear instructions about how to log in to the virtual public meeting/hearing
- An explanation of how the virtual public meeting/hearing will be conducted
- An explanation that members of the public may, as an alternative to logging in to the virtual public meeting/hearing, may call or email the project management team to ask questions about the project and access project materials
- An explanation that the public may submit public comments via email or letter
 - Provide contact information for one point of contact
 - Include an email address and phone number for them to call with questions

When conducting virtual meetings:

- All project information must be posted online
 - Provide contact information for one point of contact for questions
 - Include an email address and phone number
- The presentation must include a statement that:
 - Project materials will be mailed upon request
 - The public may submit comments via email or U.S. Mail
 - Provide contact information for one point of contact
 - Include the email address, U.S. Mail address, and a phone number

To ensure we are providing full and fair participation by conducting these meetings virtually, information must be made accessible through as many outreach methods as possible, including video, audio, website, social media, mailings, news releases, working with community agencies, etc. Strategies to communicate with potential Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations during a virtual public meeting/hearing should also be developed on a project-by-project basis. Posting

information in public places only makes sense if the businesses will remain open throughout the duration of the declared emergency.