Participation by individuals, businesses, and public and private organizations interested in Pennsylvania’s passenger and freight rail networks played an important role in the development of the 2015 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan (SRP). Stakeholders and members of the general public were actively engaged in identifying important issues and developing lists of current and future projects. They posed questions and made contributions during two stakeholder meetings, at three open houses, and through review of a draft version of the SRP report that was available online. Nearly 230 people representing themselves or one of more than 100 public, private, and non-profit organizations participated in one or more of these events.

6.1. Public Participation Approach

A key early task in the development of the SRP was the creation of a Public and Stakeholder Outreach Plan (PSOP). The PSOP was designed to provide effective opportunities for participation and contributions from a wide variety of interested parties, from members of the general public with broad interests in freight and passenger rail transportation to stakeholders with specialized knowledge in detailed aspects of the state’s rail network.
The SRP public outreach efforts built upon an extensive public participation strategy that has been part of the *PA On Track Long Range Transportation and Comprehensive Freight Movement Plan*, which has included:

1. Four PA On Track Advisory Committees (an Executive Committee, Management Committee, Technical Advisory Committee; and Freight Advisory Committee)
2. The PA On Track website ([www.paontrack.com](http://www.paontrack.com)), email list, and comments page
3. Webinars conducted in 2013 and 2014, recorded and available for viewing on the PA On Track website
4. Presentations to industry stakeholder groups (downloadable files documenting the material covered in these meetings are available on the PA On Track website)

The *State Rail Plan* PSOP has a more narrow focus on rail transportation than the *PA On Track* initiative, but has made reference to the statewide multimodal planning effort for context and background.

The PSOP focuses on two elements: stakeholder involvement and public outreach.

*Stakeholders* were defined broadly for the purpose of developing this SRP. They included representatives of Pennsylvania’s 55 Class I, II, and III freight railroads; Amtrak; SEPTA; federal agencies; Pennsylvania state departments and commissions; Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations (MPOs and RPOs); advocacy groups; transit agencies; unions, shippers; departments of transportation from neighboring states; and civic organizations. See Appendix L for lists of stakeholder organizations and of attendees at the two stakeholder meetings.

Stakeholders were contacted by e-mail messages to solicit their input. SRP project staff followed up with e-mail communication, telephone calls, and, in some cases, in-person interviews to obtain preliminary information on topics included in the SRP and to issue invitations to attend two stakeholder meetings in the spring and summer of 2015.

The general public was notified of opportunities to participate in the planning process via press releases and media announcements. The public was invited to attend one of three open houses in September 2015 and to review a draft version of the SRP report available online.

Comments from stakeholders and the public were received by e-mail, telephone, in person at stakeholder meetings and open houses, and via online comment forms.

### 6.2 Coordination with Neighboring States

As part of the development of the *2015 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan*, SRP’s from all of Pennsylvania’s neighboring states were reviewed:

1. New Jersey State Rail Plan, Final Report, April 2015
2. Delaware State Rail Plan, Final Draft, April 2011
3. Maryland State Rail Plan (currently in draft form in June 2015, under review by FRA)
5. Ohio Statewide Rail Plan, Final Report, May 2010
This effort identified opportunities for the coordination of multi-state projects that include segments in both Pennsylvania and one or more other states. The final version of the SRP identifies existing rail service in Pennsylvania that crosses state boundaries – such as SEPTA’s Regional Rail lines that provide service to stations in New Jersey and Delaware and Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor and Lake Shore Limited routes – and documents proposals for future investments to improve passenger and freight rail service between Pennsylvanian cities and towns and destinations in New York, the rest of the Mid-Atlantic region, the Midwest, and beyond.

### 6.3 Stakeholder Involvement in the Development of the State Rail Plan

The Public and Stakeholder Outreach Plan focused on preparing for 1) two stakeholder meetings, 2) a series of open house meetings in Western, Central, and Eastern Pennsylvania, and 3) the development of a State Rail Plan webpage with links to draft sections of the SRP.

The meetings in March and July were preceded in late 2014 and early 2015 by SRP project staff communications via e-mail, telephone, and in-person interviews with representatives of Amtrak, SEPTA, MPOs and RPOs across Pennsylvania, and private freight rail companies from the largest Class I railroads to the smallest Class III / Short line railroads.

This communication helped obtain three important types of information:

1. Lists of passenger and freight rail projects that have already been included in MPO and RPO Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs)
2. Projects that have been studied at the local or regional level, but that have not yet advanced far enough in design or funding to be definitively placed on a TIP or LRTP (these are documented as “vision” projects in the SRP)
3. A clear understanding of statewide rail transportation needs and challenges as perceived by key stakeholders at the local, regional, and state levels

This work was instrumental in developing draft lists of short-term and long-term passenger and freight rail projects and investments that served as the basis of discussions at stakeholder meetings. This iterative process elicited additional information on projects that were added to the short-term, long-term, and vision lists of rail projects.

### STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Two meetings with stakeholders were organized. Official invitations from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation were issued to more than 150 organizations, including freight and passenger railroads, federal and state public agencies, planning organizations (MPOs, RPOs, and Transportation Management Agencies (TMAs)), and business and civic interest groups and organizations.
The first meeting was held on March 24, 2015 at the Harrisburg Transportation Center in the Harrisburg Amtrak station. The meeting consisted of roundtable discussions and three breakout sessions to collect pertinent information that has since been incorporated into the SRP. Discussion topics included interview responses from the earlier, data-gathering phase of the project, common goals and obstacles, industry-wide issues, infrastructure needs, funding issues, and government involvement. Breakout sessions were then held to permit more in-depth and wide-ranging conversations. A total of 62 participants were present. See Appendix L for copies of the materials presented and collected at the meeting.

On July 20, 2015, the second meeting was held in the offices of SEPTA in Center City Philadelphia. This follow-up meeting focused on progress made on the SRP and specifically addressed the response rate to requests for information from private freight railroads in the state. No breakout sessions were organized, but plenary discussions provided an opportunity for all participants to raise issues and provide additional information. At the second stakeholder meeting, a total of 58 participants were present. Appendix L also includes copies of the materials presented and collected at this second meeting.
6.4 Open Houses

Three open house meetings were organized in mid-September 2015. Official invitations from PennDOT were issued to the same 150 organizations invited to the stakeholder meetings. Press releases were distributed to major media outlets in the Pittsburgh, State College, and Philadelphia metropolitan regions.

The open houses were held in Pittsburgh at the Pittsburgh Amtrak Station on September 15, 2015, in State College in the offices of the Centre Region Council of Governments on September 16, 2015, and in Philadelphia at Amtrak’s 30th Street Station on September 17, 2015 (see Figure 6-1 below). Each of the three meetings was scheduled from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. In all 109 people attended the meetings where they reviewed handouts and poster-sized maps, tables, and summaries of key elements of the SRP. All topics addressed in the SRP were covered, including current and projected future conditions of Pennsylvania’s passenger and freight rail systems and short-term and long-term proposals for rail improvements across the state. Attendees asked questions of project staff and discussed issues and provided suggestions important to them. Comment forms were provided and comments were accepted verbally, in writing, and by e-mail. Copies of posters, handouts, sign-in sheets, and the comment form are included in Appendix L.

Images from the open house and stakeholder meetings are found on the next four pages. A synopsis of comments, questions, and suggestions made by attendees at the open houses is found in a report entitled 2015 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan: Open House Summary and Comment Response that is available from PennDOT’s Bureau of Public Transportation.

Figure 6-1: Locations of Stakeholder Involvement & Open House Meetings
Pittsburgh Union (Penn) Station, Pittsburgh, PA Open House #1, Tuesday September 15, 2015

Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects
Central Region Council of Governments, State College, PA Open House #2, Wednesday September 16, 2015

Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects
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6.4 Open Houses

Stakeholder Meeting, March 24, 2015
Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Stakeholder Meeting, July 20, 2015
Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects
6.5 Project Website

The draft document was made accessible on a dedicated project webpage on the Plan the Keystone website: PlantheKeystone.com/StateRailPlan.html (See Figure 6-2 below). The links to pdf-format downloadable documents for each of the six chapters of the SRP report, the technical appendices, and an executive summary were posted to inform and engage the public. The website provided the public the opportunity to submit comments and ideas about Pennsylvania’s passenger and freight rail networks via electronic comment form. A total of 80 messages commenting on the draft 2015 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan were submitted via the website, by e-mail, or in writing.

Figure 6-2: State Rail Plan webpage on PennDOT’s Plan the Keystone Project Website
6.6 Topics of Concern Identified During the Rail Plan Process

Stakeholders and members of the public who commented on the SRP were primarily concerned about four broad topics:

1. Amounts and sources of funding and financing for passenger and freight rail projects
2. Levels and extent of intercity passenger rail service
3. Lists of passenger and freight rail projects and investments planned for the short-term (2015 to 2019), the long-term (2020 to 2040), and beyond
4. Safety of the rail networks for rail users, travelers upon other modes of transportation, and the general public

The availability and quantities of federal funding for passenger and freight rail investments was of particular concern to many stakeholders, particularly given the uncertainty of the timing of reauthorization of federal surface transportation funding legislation and funding for the National Railroad Passenger Corporation. Continuing resolutions and short-term solutions have ensured that basic levels of support for rail and other modes of transportation have been sustained, but long-term legislative action would provide greater predictability and certainty for passenger and freight rail planning efforts.

Other, non-federal opportunities for obtaining grants, loans, and other sources of capital were also discussed by participants in the stakeholder meetings and open houses. Public private partnerships, infrastructure banks, TIFIA (Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act) programs, the use of advertising revenue and other non-traditional sources of capital, bonding, and other strategies were suggested as ways to expand opportunities for completing projects.

Many attendees of the open houses, representing themselves as member of the public and sometimes also representing passenger rail advocacy organizations, requested that officials with state agencies and with Amtrak consider higher frequencies for intercity passenger rail service. This was particularly the case in Western Pennsylvania where Amtrak’s Pennsylvanian train makes a single west-bound and a single east-bound trip each day. People who commented on this issue cited expected economic, travel, and tourism benefits they believe would result from more trains per day.

The two stakeholder meetings proved to be an important source of identifying and confirming rail investment projects, particularly in the area of freight rail transportation. Participation by Pennsylvania’s private freight rail companies in identifying future investment plans was less than fifty percent after the first round of e-mail, telephone, and in-person interviews. FRA guidelines do not require private railroad to provide such information for SRP’s and many Pennsylvania railroads did not do so. Additional projects were identified at the first of the two stakeholder meetings and at the second PennDOT officials encouraged freight rail companies that had not yet provided information on plans for future projects to do so.

Safety concerns were also a topic of concern to stakeholders and members of the general public. At-grade crossings were noted as needing safety improvements or, in some cases, elimination through grade separation projects. The transport of petroleum and natural gas products through Pennsylvania, particularly those trains destined for refineries in Southeast Pennsylvania, was of particular interest to many residents. Policies to require the retirement of outdated oil cars and the purchase of new, safer and more secure oil cars were noted.
6.7 Consideration and Incorporation of Stakeholder and Public Input

All recommendations from key stakeholders were reviewed and evaluated by PennDOT and consultant staff. PennDOT planners provided written responses to documented questions and issues raised during stakeholder meetings and open houses (see Appendix L). Consultant staff incorporated all projects identified by stakeholders in the short-term, long-term, and vision passenger and freight rail project lists. Concerns and issues raised by stakeholders and members of the general public were noted in appropriate sections of the SRP.

6.8 State Rail Planning Coordination

The Bureau of Rail Freight, Ports and Waterways and the Bureau of Public Transportation within PennDOT’s Deputate for Multimodal Planning initiated and has maintained close linkages with the public and private sector stakeholder organizations identified in this chapter of the SRP. Federal, state, and regional agencies, civic and business associations, labor and private sector businesses all participated in developing the 2015 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan. Their engagement in the process of planning for improved passenger and freight rail services has strengthened organizational linkages and will ensure ongoing collaboration as challenges and opportunities arise during the short-term and long-term time periods covered in the SRP.