Mobility Investment Priorities Project

Public Engagement Report

May 2012

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Texas Transportation Institute
A Member of The Texas A&M University System
Saving Lives, Time and Resources

Establishing Mobility Investment Priorities

Under TxDOT Rider 42:

Public Engagement Report

Prepared for
Texas Transportation Commission
And
83rd Texas Legislature

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mobility Investment Priorities project is designed to identify which roadway projects and programs promise the biggest "bang for the buck" in the state's most congested regions, and to lay the groundwork to help make those projects and programs happen. But for them to happen, it is essential that the public support them *and* support the manner in which they will be paid for.

Voters—and the public in general—are more likely to support increased investment in the transportation system if they clearly recognize and understand the need for—and benefits of—that investment. That understanding is difficult to achieve without a significant investment in communications. Consequently, when transportation agencies are working to address needs in Texas' most congested corridors, each effort should include a robust public engagement element. This element should be funded at a level sufficient to ensure that the public has ample opportunity to participate meaningfully, to understand the state's transportation problems and the effect of the solutions, and to contribute to the discussion of which strategies to implement and how to pay for them.

This early and significant effort is at the heart of achieving the open and transparent public participation called for in Rider 42.

An agency's ability to achieve its goals depends heavily on the relationships it has with its many publics, and these relationships are built upon public engagement. Effective engagement not only helps an agency build public support for individual programs and projects, but it helps establish and reinforce a foundation of trust and credibility for future interaction.

This report examines the importance of effective public engagement and its place in transportation planning and development. The report underscores why transportation decision making must reflect the needs and opinions of the citizens that it will affect. The report reviews current regional engagement efforts, presents best practices and case examples, and offers recommendations to help agencies ensure that their public engagement activities are meaningful, credible, productive and successful. The recommendations outlined in this report provide a list of steps designed to achieve the goals of Rider 42. Those steps include:

1. Initiate a broad public discussion to raise awareness of the state's mobility crisis and to begin building public consensus toward solutions.
2. Sustain the discussion through means of an assertive public education campaign to help citizens and voters understand the magnitude of the state's mobility crisis and the consequences of inaction.
3. Communicate with all stakeholder groups content that is based upon polling results and project information produced through the Mobility Investment Priorities project.
4. Continue polling to ensure that changes in public opinion are understood and reflected in ongoing public engagement efforts.
5. Enlist and continually expand community-based networks of movers and doers (both elected and non-elected) to assist in educating various community segments.
6. Ensure that leader/educator networks have ongoing, meaningful interaction with citizens in a manner that accurately reflects the input and opinions of those whose lives are affected daily by worsening traffic congestion.

7. Ensure that public engagement efforts at all levels are funded at a level sufficient to ensure that communication efforts with all audiences are thorough, and that feedback from those audiences is accurate and meaningful.
8. Expand the use of technology in public engagement.

PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Getting the general public excited about transportation infrastructure investments and improvements can be a tricky task. Some people may feel as if their opinions do not make a difference. Others may feel that they cannot afford the time. Long-term transportation planning can be especially difficult since projects are considered and approved many years before they open. Nonetheless, transportation improvements impact the everyday quality of life for Americans. The fact that these projects have such a large impact creates an imperative for engaging the public and enabling community members to have a voice in the decision-making process.

Involving the public can be a difficult task. People lead busy lives, and spending time at a public meeting means they are not cooking dinner, helping with homework, or working at the office. Attracting participants, keeping the participants interested, and providing the appropriate mediums for engagement are all challenging for agencies that may not have the necessary expertise. Even if agencies meet these goals, it is still difficult to ensure that the meetings achieve the desired outcomes.

Transportation agencies have pursued a variety of strategies to engage citizens and bring them into the process. This report synthesizes the literature into four best principles to provide a guide to effective public involvement and provides case studies that illustrate these principles.

The Four Best Principles

There is a wide variety of advice and insight on how best to involve the public in transportation projects. The topics range from including disenfranchised populations, to emphasizing simplicity, to using democratic principles. The list of important aspects that agencies must consider to successfully involve the public can seem endless. However, successful engagement efforts typically adhere to four key principles:

1. Accessible events.
2. Engaging interactions.
3. Multi-platform strategies.
4. An outcome-oriented process.

Table 1 illustrates how basic public engagement guidelines address the four fundamental principles. An X indicates that the guideline has elements of the corresponding principle.

Table 1. Four Principles Matrix.

Guidelines Found in the Literature	Access	Engaging	Multi-platform	Outcomes
Make meetings accessible	X			
Make meetings engaging		X	X	
Use complementary strategies			X	
Value people's input		X		X
Include minorities and non-English speakers	X	X	X	
Make people aware of opportunities to participate	X			
Help people understand how they can participate	X			
Have proper access to forums/tools	X	X	X	
Know your audience		X		
Provide ongoing, two-way exchange	X	X		X
Use multiple channels to reach all audiences	X	X	X	
Use simple messages	X	X		
Remember that it's not just what you say; it's how you say it		X	X	
Apply democratic principles	X	X		
Provide continuous contact	X	X	X	
Ensure audience engages in decision making		X	X	X
Use appropriate strategies for appropriate audiences	X	X	X	
Make outreach convenient and interesting	X	X	X	
Focus on outcomes				X
Recognize success requires resources	X	X	X	X

The four principles are unique yet often link together in strategies for providing quality public participation. For example, some aspects of making events accessible may require using many different strategies to encourage turnout, like inviting individuals to participate through print, online and in-person communications. It is important to understand that each principle should not be used in isolation but can often apply to aspects of the other principles as well.

Accessible Events

There are many challenges to successfully involving the public, but the first and one of the most challenging is getting people involved in the event. This can be remedied by providing ease of access to the event for anyone who might want to attend. An accessible event starts with holding the event at a time and location that is convenient and familiar, like a community center, church or library. Accessibility can also require providing services to enable community members to attend, like the provision of food, daycare or translation for non-English speakers. Another way that events can be made more accessible is to provide an online component or an entirely online event. This can include a variety of strategies, but some examples are broadcasting in-person events over the Internet and allowing participants to submit questions electronically, hosting online opinion polls, or using social media sites and allowing comments and feedback.

Another important aspect of accessibility is ensuring that community members are aware of participation opportunities. Marketing the opportunities for public involvement to the community through a variety of methods can inform individuals and increase attendance. Agencies can accomplish this through encouraging media coverage, advertising on the Internet and through social networks, sending out mass mailings, or using simple word-of-mouth and personal-invitation strategies.

Whatever method (or methods) the agency chooses, it should ensure that the method is appropriate to the audience it is trying to reach. For example, an older, non-English neighborhood may not be likely to receive information distributed via social networking sites, but may respond more favorably to a mass mailing or a personal invitation. The message should also provide a compelling reason for attendance, highlighting specific problems that need to be addressed like congested corridors or roadway improvements. Without a strong case, individuals may simply disregard the marketing as irrelevant.

Engaging Interactions

Once the agency has made sure the event is accessible to all who wish to attend, the search for successful involvement shifts to "How do I best convey information *to* and receive feedback *from* those in attendance?" The literature recommends that events should be "collaborative rather than confrontational, engaging and fun, and should provide a learning experience for all involved"[1]. When community members engage and buy in to the process, the result will more likely be one of collaboration and mutual consent. It is important that the working environment is one that encourages discussion, rather than stifling dissent.

Presenting the information through games or interactive exercises can present a different way for community members to approach the project. It can foster discussion and engage the imaginations of the involved individuals. Successes have been reported with a model that used a presentation, followed by breakout and discussion sessions of smaller groups. The discussion groups report back to the whole group with recommendations on their issue. This format enables community members to take ownership of the planning process and shape the discussion. Figure 1 is a photograph illustrating community members working together in small groups at a community forum.

[1] http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/tcsp/case8.htm

Figure 1. Imagine Austin Community Forum.

Another important aspect of developing engaging interactions is *knowing your audience*. It is vital to actively seek out the key leaders and important stakeholders, and invite them to engage in the discussion. This includes knowing obvious things, like demographics and languages, but also knowing intangible aspects like cultural concerns, community leaders and important motivations. Knowledge of how community members feel about public expenditures, their most important concerns and the key stakeholders in a community can significantly impact agencies' chances of success. This sort of knowledge allows an agency to adequately prepare to discuss the pertinent community issues and bring the important stakeholders into the discussion.

It is also important that the public involvement is open and ongoing, and allows two-way exchange of information. It cannot tell community members what will happen and then allow a cursory comment period. It should provide an opportunity for community members to discuss their views and for the agency to show how their feedback will be incorporated. This creates an iterative discussion loop that encourages and enables communication, so long as both parties continue the dialogue.

The feedback mechanisms, therefore, must be simple and convenient for individuals. If barriers exist to communication, members will be less inclined to inform the agencies of their opinions and thoughts. Success also requires agencies to communicate in simple but informative text. Inundating the community with technical details and esoteric information is likely to overwhelm and deter the communication process. Agencies should provide the information that community members need to know without drowning them in detail.

Another aspect of engaging interactions is ensuring that the information is conveyed in a conversational and not condescending manner. Talking down to community members will breed resentment and hostility—hardly the recipe for successful engagement. A conversational tone will set the audience at ease and encourage communication. If individuals fear they are not "smart enough" to engage with a technically proficient speaker, they may hold back their comments and fail to contribute to the discussion at all. Speakers can prevent this from happening by fighting the urge to use jargon and bureaucratic language (e.g., excessive acronyms).

Multi-platform Strategies

When one imagines public involvement, an old cliché is likely to come to mind: a technocrat droning endlessly about esoteric jargon in a musty community center, complete with sparse attendance, minimal interaction and even less interest. Thankfully, a new age of communication and public engagement has arisen. This new age has agencies using a multi-platform engagement strategy that

emphasizes bringing community members into the discussion through mediums with which they are familiar and comfortable.

This multi-platform strategy encourages engagement from demographics that may not attend traditional public meetings. It grants people with hectic schedules the opportunity to have a say in their local governance at their convenience, as their schedule allows. It also gives community members the chance to voice their opinions in a way that is comfortable. For example, speaking at a public meeting may feel uncomfortable for some and can discourage their involvement. Providing a variety of mediums to communicate can eliminate psychological and logistical barriers, thus increasing involvement.

A key aspect of this strategy is first knowing your audience, and then providing a variety of mediums through which they can easily communicate their opinions and ideas. As discussed previously, knowledge of the local demographics is a necessary but not complete part of knowing your audience. The identification of important stakeholders, an understanding of cultural aspects, and a familiarity with local concerns will all equip the agency with the knowledge to design a more effective strategy to involve the public.

Once the agency has this information, it can begin the process of targeted outreach. Agencies should couple traditional strategies like public meetings and notices, with innovative strategies like a project website, social media sites, blogs or text message updates on important project milestones. They should also complement these strategies with focus groups, stakeholder interviews and opinion surveys.

The traditional and innovative methods should be linked as well. Agencies should advertise for public meetings through their websites and social media pages. The public meetings could provide members with the option to attend the conference electronically through a webcast. Electronic attendees could comment on the proceedings by submitting questions or commenting on the webpage. Once the event is complete, the project should post the results of the forum and allow further commenting. The project should assign one or more individuals to monitor and update the electronic resources to ensure that they are up-to-date and commenters receive responses to their questions, concerns or input.

Online opinion polling is an inexpensive method to gauge the feelings of the public. These polls could be hosted on the project website or through social media, like Facebook's polling function. The agency must take care to ensure that only community members can vote in the poll to reduce the odds of extraneous hijacking. This could be accomplished through requiring registration of users, along with a means of authenticating their local residence (e.g., requiring their address). Agencies should take care to note that often the demographics of Internet users may not match the demographics of the targeted population, so polling may not accurately reflect the sentiments of the entire populace. This can be addressed by using multiple outreach strategies, with online components being only one part of a multifaceted market research/outreach strategy.

A multi-platform communication strategy allows a more in-depth and comprehensive approach to public involvement. Using multiple, complementary strategies can facilitate greater participation levels by decreasing the barriers to public involvement.

Outcome-Oriented Process

The final principle emphasizes that all public involvement efforts should focus on achieving desired outcomes. The process should strive to achieve continuous involvement that results in meaningful decision making that reflects community values. It is important that agencies recognize that engagement is more than simply fulfilling a regulation or checking a box on a list of tasks to complete.

Public involvement provides a mechanism for communities to have a direct voice in their local governance. It bridges the divide between the bureaucracy and the people, allowing a rare opportunity for real community buy-in to the governing process. Therefore, it is important for participants to see tangible evidence that the input they provide affects the decision-making process in a meaningful way.

This principle touches all aspects of the public engagement activities. Each aspect of the process should focus on involving the public to decide issues in a manner that reflects the community's values. One part of this is genuinely listening to community members and using their input in a practical manner. This does not mean that an agency must implement every opinion that is put forward, but it does mean engaging with the community in such a way that individuals know their input was valuable and their contributions were a factor in the process. Individuals should be treated in a respectful and courteous manner. Electronically, this can mean responding to a member's post, comment or question.

Another aspect of outcome-focused engagement is soliciting involvement early in the process, before all the decisions are made. If the public perceives that engagement is an afterthought and an individual's comments will have no bearing on decisions, participation will suffer and cynicism will spread. Another important aspect is changing policies or designs if there is clear public backing for a change. If the public overwhelmingly feels that a change is needed, but the agency fails to acknowledge this and make necessary modifications, it will once again appear that the agency is unresponsive or does not care about the public's opinion.

Finally, consistent with a focus on outcomes is the recognition that success requires the dedication of resources. Organizational priorities can often be measured by the amount of resources dedicated to a specific purpose. If an agency starves the public involvement department of the necessary resources, it will be evident and likely result in poor outcomes.

It takes time and money to "pound the pavement"—meeting with local leaders and stakeholders, discovering the important community concerns, and developing relationships necessary for success. Effective public engagement also requires the dedication of the right people. It is no easy task to lead a public meeting on a controversial topic while maintaining decorum and respect. It is important for agencies to carefully select individuals capable of carrying out such a task.

Measuring Performance

A vital part of developing an outcome-oriented public involvement process is measuring the performance of the public engagement efforts. In the private sector, performance is generally measured by the amount of profits made. If a company is unsuccessful, it will face financial difficulty and (possibly) bankruptcy. The public sector does not have a universal barometer for performance, so understanding an agency or program's success requires careful evaluation.

If agencies do not measure their performance, they may be completely unaware of their progress toward attaining their goals or missions. Performance measurement not only informs agencies about their ability to achieve their goals, but can also provide valuable information that can be used to allocate resources, educate the public, and improve performance.

As a caveat, performance measurement is a large topic, and this section only provides a very brief overview of the most pertinent topics. For more detailed information and a guide to measuring performance, please see Harry Hatry's book, *Performance Measurement: Getting Results* (2006).

Measuring the performance of public engagement requires measuring the relevant inputs, outputs and outcomes. Table 2 summarizes the definitions of input, output and outcome.

Table 2. Input, Output and Outcome.

Term	Definition
Input	The amount of resource used (funds, employee time, etc.)
Output	The amount of products and services delivered (number of event attendees, miles of roads paved, etc.)
Outcome	The events, occurrences or changes in conditions, behavior or attitudes that indicate progress toward a program's mission and objectives (the ability to develop a program or project in a manner that reflects the community's values and ideals, etc.)

Before agencies can begin to measure performance, they must first determine their overarching mission (or goal) and specific individual objectives. The mission identifies the overarching goal of the program. All activities that individuals engage in should (in some way) help the program achieve its mission.

Once a mission has been identified, agencies should identify what inputs, outputs and outcomes to measure. Inputs and outputs are often relatively straightforward and are most commonly the amount of employee time or agency money dedicated to the program. When possible, inputs should be tied to processes, outputs and even outcomes. This sort of performance measurement provides a sort of causal chain linking how the public's dollars are spent, what they are used for, and what results are achieved per dollar invested.

Outputs are commonly direct results of the processes; in the case of public involvement, outputs could be the number of attendees at an event, comments received or unique hits on a website. These measures are less desirable than outcomes because outcomes provide a direct (and not proxy) measure of performance.

Outcomes can be more complicated since they often reflect the overall goal the program wishes to achieve. In the case of public involvement, a measure could be the ability of the community to influence the planning process, how well the final project reflects the community's values, or another related measure. It can be difficult to accurately quantify outcomes due to their often intangible and more qualitative benefits, but some strategies could include the following:

- Ask participants through customer satisfaction surveys if they felt events were successful (if they feel their thoughts were/will be included in the final process, if they were able to communicate their viewpoints successfully, if the event was respectful and constructive, etc.).
- Monitor the demographics of those attending and contributing at events, and proactively attempt to reach out to groups that are underrepresented.
- Use other measures that reflect the selected outcome.

Finally, gathering and analyzing the performance measures are pointless activities if the information is not put to use. Agencies and programs should take the performance information they gained and use it to improve, allocate and incentivize. Data that reveal areas that the agency could improve should be noted and further analyzed to understand why the deficiency occurred and what can be done to improve in the future. The data can be used to allocate resources, when appropriate, to areas that have

the largest return on investment. Agencies can also use performance measures to measure employee performance and tie bonuses or other monetary incentives to achieving higher results. This must be used with caution, however, because some results are beyond the employee's control.

Summary of Four Best Principles

Each of the four best principles encapsulates a large amount of advice from the literature on public involvement. An agency that adheres to these core principles will be well on its way to a strong and successful public involvement program. As a review, agencies should provide convenient access to a variety of engaging public involvement forums. All of these activities should be carried out in a means that is transparent and outcome focused. In applying these principles, agencies should follow several fundamental guidelines:

- **Know your audience**—Know how much they know, how they feel, and what their concerns, biases and self-interests are. An agency may be thinking "it's our project," while the audience is thinking "it's our money" or "it's my neighborhood." Make an emotional connection with them on issues of importance to them such as safety, convenience, quality of life and more time for family. Know who their thought influencers and opinion leaders are; that's who they trust, and it may not be their elected leaders. Demonstrate what's in it for them; that's what leads to public support. Make allowances for language and cultural differences. Understand the opposition groups, and engage them directly and early in the process.
- **Employ democratic principles**—Allow everyone to have an opportunity to debate the issues, frame alternatives, and affect final decisions. This means providing information to make such decisions. Be inclusive and thorough without overburdening the public with technical information. Provide meaningful information that will allow the public to make an assessment of a project or program's importance and the anticipated costs and benefits of it.
- **To reach all audiences, use multiple channels**—Knowing your target audience and adjusting your message and/or messenger to that audience will significantly increase the potential for meaningful involvement. Know what issues are important to which groups, and make sure that these issues are addressed. This means seeking these issues out, using techniques that increase the public's opportunities for participation, and providing ample opportunities and mechanisms for participation.
- **Provide continuous contact**—Establishing a rapport with the community facilitates trust. Regularly engage members of the community with agency staff. Ensure that engagement occurs from the earliest stages of decision making, through implementation, and continuing throughout operations.
- **Focus on outcomes**—Strive for continuous involvement that results in meaningful decision making that reflects community values. Meaningful public engagement involves more than fulfilling a legal obligation or counting the number of attendees at a public hearing. Encourage collaboration and demonstrate that opinions are being incorporated into decision making. Determine at the outset whether the intent is simply to engage and inform, or to move people to action. If the messages and strategies do not support the purpose, something needs to change. Imagine on the front end what success should look like on the back end. Select an appropriate measure to gauge progress and effectiveness.

- **Simple messages work best**—The shorter and simpler that communications are, the more memorable they will be. If they are memorable, they will stick. And if they stick, they are more likely to produce a desired result. In communicating information related to the Mobility Investment Priorities (MIP) effort, the messages should be structured in this manner:

    - **For programs (traffic and demand management):** *This is how this thing works, and this is what you can expect to get out of it.*
    - **For projects (construction, for the most part):** *This is what this new or expanded road or bridge would provide, and this is what you can expect to get out of it.*
    - **For financing options:** *This is how this project would be paid for, and this is how much it would cost you personally over the course of a year or month.*

Public involvement in transportation decision making has been federally mandated for several decades, and at times, agencies have viewed the activity as a burden. But in fact, the benefits of effective public engagement to an agency far outweigh the burdens of federal, state or local requirements. These benefits include:

- **Citizen ownership of the project**—A citizenry that has been involved in program or project development assesses needs and identifies issues early in the process, and contributes to workable solutions. Involvement in the decision-making process contributes to a sense of ownership of the solutions. This increases over time.
- **Decisions that reflect community values**—Effective public engagement includes connecting with all members of the community. The results are collaborative efforts that have diverse community values embedded in the solutions.
- **Efficient implementation**—A proactive public participation process highlights the concerns of the public so that these concerns may be addressed early in the process, thereby expediting implementation and often reducing costs. This cost savings is a benefit to the public as well as the agency.
- **Enhanced agency credibility**—An agency culture of open, transparent and meaningful public engagement can significantly enhance credibility with the public. A public that feels respected and valued will have a more positive opinion of an agency and its ability to implement projects and programs. Credibility builds trust with the public.

TAKING TRANSPORTATION ISSUES TO THE PUBLIC: NEXT GENERATION

A number of tools are available for agencies to engage the public in outreach activities. In most cases, the agencies provide information to stakeholders and the general public that outlines the purpose and need for project improvements. Alternatives are presented, and feedback is solicited. In many of these instances, this information is only reaching a small proportion of the people who may be affected by the project.

For example, a person may not live within the corridor limits but may use the corridor to commute to a job every day. Time constraints and family obligations may prevent the person from staying late after work to attend a public meeting that is typically held in or adjacent to the corridor. Is this person any less affected by the potential solution than the retired person in the adjacent neighborhood? Is this person's opinion any less important or relevant?

Since the late 1990s the federal government has undertaken an effort to expand accessibility and increase accountability. These efforts, known as Gov 2.0, are based on the ideals behind Web 2.0: "facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design and collaboration"[2]. There is an increasing recognition that people can and should play a more active role in shaping their government and their community. These new tools facilitate interactive decision making.

The Rider 42 project provides the perfect vehicle to implement these tools to allow the public to make their own recommendations for possible strategies, express their preference for proposed solutions, and indicate their preferred method of paying for improvements. By actively engaging communities in an open and transparent dialogue (i.e., meaningful two-way communication), project sponsors demonstrate their accountability to the public they serve and provide an opportunity for the public to take ownership of the projects. This improves the decision-making process, eases implementation, and can reduce project costs by minimizing or eliminating change orders or legal challenges.

To achieve the public engagement objectives of Rider 42, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) will work with agencies and their consultants to develop project information. This project information will include components that will allow the public to make informed decisions about their preferences. The information will include, at least:

- The proposed improvement(s) (alternatives).
- The personal benefit (e.g., time savings, fuel savings, improved accessibility and/or improved amenities).
- The societal benefit (e.g., improved job opportunities, economic growth and/or reduced pollution).
- What it would cost (per household) and over what time period.
- How the improvement might be paid for.
- How the funding mechanisms might affect implementation timing.
- Project constraints and limitations (non-starters).

This information will be accompanied by maps, illustrations, renderings and other media as appropriate.

The information will be made available to the public through an idea-sharing platform. TTI has examined three suitable platforms for their viability for this effort. These include MindMixer

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0

(www.mindmixer.com), Peak Democracy (www.peakdemocracy.com) and CrowdBrite (www.crowdbrite.com). Each offers similar features and costs, and all have been used for planning purposes. Table 3 indicates some of the unique features of each platform and is only for illustrative purpose of the types of features that may be available in any idea-sharing platform.

Table 3. Features of Idea-Sharing Platforms.

Feature	MindMixer	Peak Democracy	CrowdBrite
Requires user login through registration or Facebook credentials	✓	✓	✓
Supports video, illustrations, renderings, PowerPoint, etc.	✓	✓	✓
Supports texting and call-in capabilities	✓	✓	✓
Provides site hosting, administration and customer service	✓	✓	✓
Provides access to a site activity dashboard	✓	✓	
Provides detailed project reporting	✓	✓	✓
Provides a civic reward program	✓	✓	✓
Can geotag users	✓	✓	✓
Has voting capabilities	✓	✓	✓
Allows cross-platform sharing (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	✓	✓	✓
Focuses solely on governments, and services comply with free speech rights, public records retention, and request and sunshine ordinances	✓	✓	✓
Allows comments to be sorted by support and relationships between comments	✓	✓	✓
Allows Open Town Hall to be embedded on local websites		✓	
Offers a mobile app			✓
Hosts live online meetings			✓
Generates real-time reports	✓		✓
Can create records of engagement	✓	✓	✓
Organizes comments	✓	✓	✓
Has Quick Read (QR) code capability	✓	✓	
Provides interactive budgeting	✓	✓	

Any of these platforms can be used to provide information to a broader public. Most project websites offer this information, but they lack an interactive feature that allows the public to communicate with each other—building on ideas and understanding others' viewpoints. Using an idea-sharing platform is an innovative approach to increasing participation and encouraging a more collaborative effort. This is a complementary tool to traditional outreach activities and is a mechanism to reach people that might not

otherwise participate in a public meeting or open house. It also allows interested parties to participate on their own time, at their own convenience. Commuters who benefit from an improvement, for example, are often not well represented at public meetings, where neighborhood residents are well motivated to present their views on the project. This method for providing input can capitalize on ideas from the public, which can lead to greater acceptability of the solutions and an appreciation for the broad set of benefits and costs.

TAKING TRANSPORTATION NEEDS TO THE VOTERS

Transportation initiatives have been appearing on statewide ballots for decades, but with transportation financing resources dwindling, more states and localities are increasingly looking for ways to supplement revenues. In most situations, they are taking their case to the voters.

Nationwide, transportation initiatives have appeared on 29 state ballots over the last 10 years; most are related to finance or funding in some way. Local initiatives are even more prevalent. Table 4, compiled from information at the Center for Transportation Excellence website, shows some of the statewide initiatives, *related to funding only,* along with the anticipated date or outcome. The table includes only initiatives that were put forth to the voters.

Table 4. Initiatives Relating to Funding from the Last 10 Years.

Measure	Description	State	Year	Success	Defeat
Sales Tax Increase to Fund Transportation	Constitutional amendment to increase sales tax by 1 cent for transportation	GA	2012		
Transportation Trust Fund Amendment	Constitutional amendment to establish trust fund solely for transportation, funded by 10-cent increase in gas tax, 50% increase in vehicle registration fees, and in 2013 indexing gas tax to construction costs	MD	2012		
Motor Vehicle Tax	Constitutional amendment to require voter approval of taxes and fees on motor vehicle use, ownership and fuel enacted after January 1, 2009	OR	2012		
Motor Vehicle Initiative 490	Sets a $30 increase in annual vehicle license fee, repeals a $3 registration application fee, and requires voter approval for automatic ticketing cameras	WA	2012		
Transportation Initiative 1125	Prohibits gas tax and toll revenues to be diverted to non-transportation purposes and requires lawmakers to approve toll rates	WA	2011		✓
10-Year Road and Bridge Construction Program	Constitutional amendment for a 10-year program funded by appropriations from Alabama trust fund	AL	2010		✓
Capital Bonds for Transportation	Allows issuance of general obligation bonds to match federal funds to improve highways, roads and bridges, not to exceed $80 million	RI	2010	✓	
Bonds for Transportation	Allows issuance of bonds in the amount of $315,050,000	AK	2008	✓	
Proposition 1A	Allows issuance of $9.95 billion in general obligation bonds for high-speed rail	CA	2008	✓	
Proposition 91	Constitutional amendment to prohibit the use of funds earmarked for transportation to be put in general fund	CA	2008		✓
Transportation Bonds, Question 1	Allows issuance of bonds in the amount of $89,715,000	RI	2008	✓	
Proposition 12	Constitutional amendment allowing for issuance of $5 billion in bonds	TX	2007	✓	

Measure	Description	State	Year	Success	Defeat
Transportation Funding Protection	Limits conditions under which the transfer of gas tax revenues to the state general fund are handled	CA	2006	✓	
Highway and Port Safety and Air Quality Bond Act	Authorizes the sale of $19.925 billion of general obligation bonds for transportation projects to "relieve congestion, improve the movement of goods, improve air quality and enhance safety and security of the system"	CA	2006	✓	
Motor Vehicle Sales Tax Amendment	Constitutional amendment that dedicates revenue from a sales tax on the sale of new and used motor vehicles over a five-year period to be at least 40% for transit and not more than 60% for highway purposes	MN	2006	✓	
Question 5, Transportation Bonds Act	Allows issuance of $80 million in bonds to provide direct funding of improvements to highways, roads and bridges	RI	2006	✓	
Referendum D	Allows borrowing of $2.072 billion with maximum repayment of $3.225 billion	CO	2005		✓
Transportation Bond Issue	Allows issuance of $33.1 million in bond debt	ME	2005	✓	
Proposal 2	Allows issuance of $2.9 billion in bond debt	NY	2005	✓	
Question 723	Increases fuel taxes to fund the creation of the Oklahoma Bridge and Highway Trust Fund	OK	2005		✓
Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund	Constitutional amendment to create a rail relocation and improvement fund; allows issuance of public debt	TX	2005	✓	
Initiative 912	Repeal of the motor vehicle fuel tax increase of 3 cents in 2005 and 2006, 2 cents in 2007, and 1.5 cents in 2008	WA	2005		✓
Amendment 6	Repeal of a constitutional amendment that requires legislature, cabinet and governor to proceed with development and operation of high-speed rail	FL	2004	✓	
Amendment 3	Constitutional amendment to require all revenues from existing motor vehicle fuel tax be used only for state and local highways, bridges and roads, and to require that vehicle taxes and fees paid by highway users be used only for constructing and maintaining the state highway system	MO	2004	✓	
Question 3	Allows issuance of general obligation bonds not to exceed $66,520,000	RI	2004	✓	
Question 6	Allows issuance of $63,450,000 for transportation improvements	ME	2003	✓	
Proposition 14	Constitutional amendment to allow for issuance of notes or borrowing of money to fund highway improvement projects	TX	2003	✓	

Financing for transportation systems has devolved even more in the last few decades. At the local level, more residents are voting to tax themselves for transportation projects that directly affect them. In fact, these initiatives have had greater success than statewide efforts. The popularity of local sales taxes for transportation can be attributed to four factors:

- **Direct voter approval**—The measures result in projects that voters can easily appreciate and realize the benefits of. It provides tangible evidence of the reason for the tax.
- **Finite lives**—Often the taxes are implemented only for a specified time period. This gives voters a sense of control over the use of their money.
- **Specific projects**—Often taxes are used only on specific projects or programs, thus taking away discretion to spend the money on other things.
- **Local control over revenues**—Money that is raised locally is spent locally and for local benefit.

In a supplement to National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) 20-24(62)A, Making the Case for Transportation Investment and Revenue, the authors put forth three case studies of successful campaigns to raise revenue for transportation. Two of the campaigns successfully increased funding through legislation, while the third was voter approved. In research following the votes, the messages that were used in the campaigns were tested with three focus groups and a survey. The focus groups were conducted in three areas other than where the measures were successfully enacted, to determine whether the messages resonated in other areas as well as they did in the original campaigns. The survey was conducted in Washington, D.C., with a population that was designed to emulate how elected officials might respond.

In each of the three case studies, the research identified core requirements for a successful campaign. The requirements are:

- Agency credibility.
- Accepted need.
- An influential coalition.
- Political support.
- Effective messaging.
- A winning strategy.

While these factors are critically important, they are not necessarily enough for a successful campaign. The research found myriad additional factors that could mean the difference between success and failure at the ballot box. Surveys and polls were found to be especially important if voters are to decide an initiative because the research can help indicate whether or not the initiative stands a chance of succeeding. It also indicates which themes, messages and proposals evoke the most favorable response. In situations where voters are deciding, "an effort no less than a full-scale political campaign is required"[3]. The campaign should include an effective organization managed by experienced and accomplished campaign staff with sufficient financial resources to ensure that all aspects of the campaign reach the appropriate people at the appropriate time with the appropriate information and the right level of detail.

Gaining support among legislators can be complicated in different ways. It often involves the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships between unlikely allies. In this situation, it is imperative to have a campaign that can accurately and proactively forge these relationships.

[3] http://downloads.transportation.org/Making_the_Case_Transportation_Investment_and_Revenue.pdf

Other factors that affect successful outcomes include:

- A stand-alone transportation package or broader funding package.
- Bipartisan or partisan support.
- Out-front or behind-the-scenes spokesperson leadership.
- Grass-tops (from the top down) support from insiders and outsiders.
- A specific list of potential projects—whether to have one or not.
- Timing.
- The line between education and advocacy.
- The funding source.
- Messaging.

This brief history and the more recent case studies demonstrate that the case can be made for transportation investment. But it requires considerable groundwork. A successful campaign needs the guidance of an experienced public relations/marketing firm, a commitment of leadership, a clear message and steadfast resolve to see the effort through. The research shows that funding increases are supported by the public when the purpose is clear, the need is documented, the mechanism is reasonable, and the added value is apparent. This challenge is made easier when agencies have already developed a meaningful public engagement program and the voters have a sense that the agencies are credible and trustworthy. These are traits that are built over time. Demonstrating that public engagement is a priority to an agency and that the public's concerns and suggestions are considered is the foundation necessary to build public trust.

CONTRACTING FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SERVICES

In many cases, agencies are unlikely to have adequate staff specifically trained in proactive public engagement to plan and carry out the types of substantial public engagement programs that are necessary to the success of a major transportation project. This temporary need is best addressed by contracting with one or more firms specializing in this topic.

Agencies should assign high priority to a number of elements that are essential to a meaningful and successful program when seeking proposals for public engagement services. The public engagement plan contained in any proposal should include specific activities addressing each of the areas below. Properly funded and executed, these activities will produce lasting benefits—for both the planners and the users of any transportation project.

1. **Audience research**—The agencies and consultant team must have a clear understanding of public sentiment, in both general and specific terms. A mix of qualitative and quantitative research efforts should assess public sentiment at critical points in the planning process, providing guidance to adjust the program as necessary.
2. **Audience access**—Consultant teams should demonstrate how they will offer multiple opportunities for public engagement, using a variety of forums, strategies and time frames. It must be simple and convenient for people to participate, no matter where they live, when they work, or what language they speak. If public engagement efforts are limited to those actions required by law, public input will be insufficient.
3. **Inclusiveness**—There must be a commitment to seek out and engage those individuals who are less inclined to participate. Any public engagement effort that excludes part of the community (intentionally or not) will be unrepresentative and unproductive, at best. At worst, it runs the risk of alienating that part of the community and perhaps others. It is not enough to simply make opportunities for involvement available. In addition, actively engaging all members of the community not only ensures broad representation but may also ensure that no one group dominates by over-representation.
4. **A broad array of strategies**—The broader the array of public engagement strategies, the more comprehensive that engagement will be. Each community is different, so the mix of traditional and social media alternatives will vary according to community characteristics and needs.
5. **Simplicity and clarity**—The consultant team should have a demonstrated ability to present information in an audience-friendly manner. Transportation development is a complex process, and that complexity creates an obstacle to gaining the public understanding that is essential to securing public support of new transportation investment.
6. **Responsiveness**—The consultant team should be sufficiently staffed and prepared to ensure that citizen contacts are handled in a responsive fashion. Citizens are likely to feel ignored if their input is not acknowledged or their questions are not addressed promptly.
7. **Creativity**—A meaningful pubic engagement program should not be restricted to traditional, tried and true strategies, no matter how reliable they may be. Novel approaches can add to the volume and quality of public input. And the extra effort inherent in trying new approaches sends an important message about an agency's commitment to genuine public engagement.
8. **Measurement**—Counting how many public meetings were held or how many newsletters were distributed is not enough because these metrics only measure output; they do not measure outcome. Ultimately, the process is not about what you tell the public or even what they hear—it's more about what the public *does* after they hear you.

REGIONAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS AND NEEDS

Agencies in each of the state's most congested regions conduct public engagement activities that vary in nature and scope. This section of the report illustrates those activities and, where appropriate, outlines areas in which more or different activities might enhance public engagement efforts. The numbers in parenthesis indicate the rank of the congested corridor in the top 50.

Austin Region

The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) engages in regular public outreach activities when developing and amending the long-range plan, the transportation improvement plan and the unified planning work program. CAMPO is considering a tiered approach to public input that identifies and refines the best methods to solicit public participation in planning efforts. A tiered approach allows minor plan, project or funding changes to be expedited through the planning process. For example, a project that changes a funding source but not the scope or length of the project is a minor amendment, while new projects or expansions of scope are considered tier 2 projects. More concentrated efforts can be focused on projects or plans that have more substantial changes. The intent of this approach is to more effectively use limited resources.

IH 35

Outreach in Austin's IH 35 corridor has benefited from two efforts. The first effort was the result of action by the Texas Transportation Commission in the formation of an IH 35 Advisory Committee and four segment committees that reported to the Advisory Committee. The segment committees were tasked with examining the corridor challenges from a local perspective, identifying possible solutions, and offering recommendations to the committee. The committee engaged local stakeholders, citizens and community leaders in developing options and alternatives in the Austin area. This "from the ground up" approach with significant public involvement activities resulted in a plan that reflects the interests and concerns of citizens through local and regional recommendations for meeting the mobility needs along Texas' IH 35 corridor. The recommendations are documented in the August 2011 *IH 35 Corridor Advisory Committee Plan.*

In the second effort, the City of Austin is undertaking an IH 35 corridor development study. The study has a robust public engagement component. The project sponsors held an open house to brief the public on the project in downtown Austin on September 28, 2011. The open house was designed to allow for small-group discussion by having people sign up for small-group session times that began each half hour. Reservations were requested but not required. This new approach was designed to provide an opportunity for interested participants to engage in a focused discussion regarding potential solutions in the corridor. Using a smaller, more focused discussion may elicit more feedback, especially from those that may be reluctant to speak in a large-group setting. Each of these efforts is a "good practice" approach early in a project. However, attendance at this event was very low. An inconvenient location and difficult accessibility may have led to a low turnout.

Other planned outreach/communication activities include:

- Development of a context-sensitive solution (CSS) strategy and process.
- Establishment of a stakeholder working group (SWG) representing different travel markets, communities and interests.
- Communication materials—hard copy, electronic or social media.

Next Steps

The public involvement plan for this planning effort should proactively strive for engagement of a broad range of stakeholders—some of whom may not be located in the corridor. Efforts should be made to identify user profiles, such as businesses operating in the corridor, commuters traveling to downtown, trucking interests, both local and through traffic, state government, university representatives, and frequent out-of-town travelers. These users can be targeted to provide unique perspectives on potential solutions.

The significance of the IH 35 corridor should give the project a higher profile. This could be enhanced by:

- Smaller, concentrated community meetings, which can generate interest in the project that can lead to increased attendance at an open-house type of event.
- A dedicated website (the project is described within a City of Austin webpage).
- A frequently asked questions (FAQ) website section, which should be used to increase awareness of the project.
- Social media, which can be used more aggressively, such as to receive comments, publicize important meetings or website updates, and report results.

MoPac

The Loop 1/MoPac improvement project is being jointly developed by TxDOT and the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA), with CTRMA taking the lead on public engagement activities. A comprehensive public outreach plan has been drafted. Specific activities highlighted in the plan include:

- One-on-one meetings with neighborhood leaders, businesses and organizations in the corridor.
- One-on-one meetings with other community stakeholder groups that may be outside the corridor.
- Engagement of stakeholders previously opposed to MoPac improvements to proactively seek their input as new solutions are identified.
- Regular updates and presentations to boards and the staff of other transportation agencies.
- Elected and community leader briefings.
- Education workshops to introduce unfamiliar concepts to key stakeholders.
- Targeted outreach to corridor users.
- Virtual open house meetings.
- Brown bag lunches for major employers.
- A variety of communication tools, including:
    - Project maps.
    - Fact sheets.
    - PowerPoint presentations.
    - Multimedia demonstrations.
    - Virtual tours.
    - E-newsletters.
    - An e-mail hotline.
- A comprehensive website, including FAQs, maps, videos, history and social media tools.

The above tools and techniques take advantage of technology to provide a comprehensive picture of the project and its potential solutions. Practices such as identifying and targeting specific users will allow the information to be tailored to particular audiences.

Next Steps

Many community meetings have already been conducted. These should continue to ensure that all perspectives are being addressed. Specific changes resulting from these meetings should be incorporated into project development and highlighted to demonstrate that opinions are being heard and heeded. The effectiveness of all strategies should be measured throughout the process. The measures should be tied to measurable objectives in the public involvement plan. They should demonstrate that all affected and interested parties are given an opportunity to provide input and that input is reflected in the project development. If adjustments are needed, they should be made early in the process.

Dallas-Fort Worth Region

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) maintains, as stated on its website, that "a proactive public participation process is vital to ensuring that the transportation planning process fosters meaningful involvement by all users of the system, including the business community, community groups, environmental organizations, freight operators and the traveling public." Consequently, the organization seeks to proactively educate and engage area citizens in the transportation planning process. In addition, NCTCOG seeks to communicate the benefits of an efficient transportation system and how that system contributes to the region's overall quality of life. The organization's public participation plan intends to provide opportunities for early and continuing involvement, and strives to go beyond legal requirements to ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in decision making.

Both NCTCOG and the TxDOT Dallas and Fort Worth Districts use a range of strategies to encourage public involvement in transportation planning. Those strategies include public meetings at various times and locations, web-based information, monthly and quarterly printed and electronic newsletters, news media relations, social media, and visualization tools.

TxDOT, in its general requirements for Programmatic Comprehensive Development Agreements, underscores the link between public support and project success, and outlines the expectations and requirements for developers who are directly responsible for designing and implementing a Public Information and Communication Plan. The requirements address:

- Qualifications and responsibilities of a project's public information coordinator.
- Operational details of a public information office for the project.
- Segmenting of customer groups.
- Guidelines for public meetings and preparation of meeting minutes.
- Emergency event communications.
- Lane closures.
- Specific outreach tools and strategies, such as a website, newsletters, signage, brochures, etc.

In broad and general terms, the most active and robust public engagement efforts underway in the region are related to the IH 635 project in Dallas and the North Tarrant Express (NTE) project in Fort Worth.

It is noteworthy that the outreach efforts for these two projects largely mirror each other, and both benefitted from lessons learned on the DFW Connector outreach effort. While it is not on the list of most congested corridors, the DFW Connector project in Grapevine maintains an exemplary public information office and a robust public information and communication plan. TxDOT staff members regard the DFW Connector public engagement effort as a model for similar projects statewide.

IH 635 LBJ Freeway (#3)

The LBJ Freeway Managed Lanes project is the most ambitious transportation improvement project in North Texas. The project will add managed lanes from Luna Road east to US 75 (the High Five interchange) along with continuous frontage roads, and will provide added capacity to the existing non-tolled lanes. The project—funded through a combination of private and public funds—also includes the addition of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane connectors to IH 35 East. The improvements are expected to mitigate congestion and nearly double the roadway's capacity.

The public involvement process for improvements to IH 635 began nearly a decade ago. In 2006, TxDOT made modifications to the originally approved designs. Federal Highway Administration approval for the changes was secured in 2008. In 2009, the project team held a public hearing to review financial information on the project.

Environmental documents and a project flyer are available on the project website, www.newlbj.com. This site and another site, www.lbjexpress.com, highlight public engagement efforts for this project. Site visitors can access substantial information on the projects, including records of public meetings, schedules, archived press releases and news stories, maps, and videos, one of which features an aerial tour/computer simulation of a drive through the completed project.

The public information and communication plan for the LBJ Express project states that communication strategy is as important as the construction of the project itself. The plan stresses the need for consistent messages and continuous outreach and collaboration, along with a focus on being flexible and responsive to the changing needs and conditions of the project. The LBJ Infrastructure Group (LBJIG) team—the developer—subscribes to a number of communication principles that guide its public engagement activities. These principles emphasize plain-language communication, active listening and understanding the position of customers who are being affected by the project. Efforts are directed by a corporate affairs director, under the supervision of a TxDOT public information officer.

Ongoing public engagement activities include:

- Stakeholder, customer and media outreach.
- Development and distribution of print and electronic collateral material.
- Meetings, hearings and presentations for dialogue, input and feedback.
- Emergency/crisis planning and implementation.
- Marketing and advertising.

More specific efforts include:

- A project website with a real-time travel speed map, live traffic images, projects maps and schedules, information on public meetings and presentations by project staff, toll tag information, limited Spanish-language materials, incident notification via text message or e-mail, and social media applications.

- A mobile website allowing commuters to receive lane closure information on their smart phones.
- A public information office that is staffed five days per week (and by appointment on Saturdays), where team members can address stakeholder/customer questions and concerns, along with a 24-hour hotline.
- Project exhibits and group tours.
- Media tours and proactive media relations focusing on local, state and national media.
- Coordination with stakeholder and customer groups, including meetings of varying sizes at varying locations.
- Specialized, consistent communications with emergency service providers.
- Management of an audience and stakeholder database.
- Education and training of presenters.
- A donation of $1.3 million to school districts in the area affected by their construction, to fund expansion of advanced-placement math and science programs.
- Public relations campaign planning.
- Monitoring of media reports, including print and broadcast media, and blogs.
- Correspondence with elected officials.
- A targeted business outreach initiative, introduced in February 2012 to enhance communication with affected businesses along the corridor.

Periodic audits of the Public Information and Communication Plan are intended to monitor contractor performance and identify areas of potential noncompliance. The audits are also intended to highlight areas where adjustments might be needed to ensure the overall effectiveness of outreach efforts.

North Tarrant Express (#14 and #8)

The North Tarrant Express project is designed to relieve congestion on IH 820 (North Loop) and SH 183/SH 121 (Airport Freeway). There are plans to extend the project along IH 35W (North Freeway) from downtown Fort Worth north toward Alliance Airport. Construction began in 2010 and will involve rebuilding the four to six existing main lanes and adding four managed lanes. Two additional non-tolled main lanes are planned to be added no later than 2030. The current project, which is expected to double the corridor's capacity, will be completed by 2015 and is being funded two-thirds through private funds and one-third through public funds.

The public information and communication plan for the North Tarrant Express states that communication strategy is as important as the construction of the project itself. The plan stresses the need for consistent messages and continuous outreach and collaboration, along with a focus on being flexible and responsive to the changing needs and conditions of the project. The North Tarrant Express Mobility Partners (NTEMP) team subscribes to a number of communication principles that guide its public engagement activities. These principles emphasize plain-language communication, active listening and understanding the position of customers who are being affected by the project. Although the NTE project is located in the TxDOT Fort Worth District, efforts are directed by a corporate affairs director, under the supervision of a public information officer based in the TxDOT Dallas District.

Ongoing public engagement activities include:

- Stakeholder, customer and media outreach.
- Development and distribution of print and electronic collateral material.
- Meetings, hearings and presentations for dialogue, input and feedback.

- Emergency/crisis planning and implementation.
- Marketing and advertising.

More specific efforts largely mirror those of the IH 635 LBJ Freeway Managed Lanes project:

- A project website with a real-time travel speed map, live traffic images, projects maps and schedules, information on public meetings and presentations by project staff, toll tag information, limited Spanish-language materials, incident notification via text message or e-mail, and social media applications.
- A mobile website allowing commuters to receive lane closure information on their smart phones.
- A public information office that is staffed six days per week, where team members can address stakeholder/customer questions and concerns, along with a 24-hour hotline.
- Project exhibits and group tours.
- Media tours and proactive media relations focusing on local, state and national media.
- Coordination with stakeholder and customer groups, including meetings of varying sizes at varying locations.
- Specialized, consistent communications with emergency service providers.
- Management of an audience and stakeholder database.
- Education and training of presenters.
- A donation of $1.3 million to school districts in the area affected by new construction, to fund expansion of advanced-placement math and science programs.
- Participation in city-led traffic management team briefings.

Periodic audits of the Public Information and Communication Plan are intended to monitor contractor performance and identify areas of potential noncompliance. The audits are also intended to highlight areas where adjustments might be needed to ensure the overall effectiveness of outreach efforts.

IH 35 West (#8)

Mobility improvements along IH 35 West began with a public meeting on the segment between IH 820 and US 287 in early 2012. No other specific outreach plans are yet in place for improvements on the stretch from IH 30 to SH 183, although another effort, the My 35 outreach, does encompass this corridor. My 35 is a citizen-led planning effort to find solutions for the IH 35 corridor from Gainesville to Laredo. The effort is overseen by a Corridor Advisory Committee. Four segment committees involve local decision makers and the public in determining the best solutions for their communities.

IH 35 Stemmons Freeway (#12 and #19)

As yet, there is no website dedicated to planned improvements to the Stemmons Freeway, although the section of IH 35 from IH 635 South to Loop 12 is addressed on the websites dedicated to LBJ Freeway improvements. According to the website www.keepitmovingdallas.com, a number of public hearings have discussed different segments along this corridor. Also available on the website are a fact sheet and brochure of project information and details. The public can submit questions or comments via the website. TxDOT created the My 35 website (http://www.my35.org), which the public can access to provide public input.

Woodall Rogers Freeway (#5)

As yet, there are no specific public engagement efforts in place for improvements to Woodall Rogers Freeway. However, TxDOT has maintained active interactions with the news media regarding the impacts from construction of the urban park. In addition, the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge has a webcam: http://trinityrivercorridor.com/bridgepics/index.html.

US 75 North Central Expressway

As yet, there are no specific public engagement efforts in place for improvements to US 75.

Opportunities for Greater Effectiveness in Public Engagement in the Dallas-Fort Worth Region

As was noted earlier, the public engagement process for major roadway projects in the region has evolved in recent years. TxDOT and its contractors were able to draw from lessons learned on the DFW Connector effort and build in enhancements to the LBJ Express and North Tarrant Express plans. The DFW Connector public engagement effort in Grapevine (near the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport) involved a number of enhanced communication strategies, but perhaps the most important aspect relates to timing. With both the NTE and LBJ projects, public engagement efforts did not begin until after funding sources had been identified for each project. In the case of the DFW Connector, outreach activities began well in advance of funding source determination. That early start, according to project team leaders, was central to the effort's success in building public understanding and support in the early stages.

In addition to timing considerations, some of the more innovative and distinctive public engagement strategies for the DFW Connector project include:

- The use of three subcontractors for specialized outreach activities, including branding and graphic design, website development, and targeted governmental relations.
- Business Owner Task Forces, through which business representatives are briefed on scheduled work in the vicinity of their properties.
- Specialized outreach training for engineering/technical staff members.
- More detailed segmenting of stakeholder and customer groups, e.g., community groups, schools and churches.
- More detail and greater specificity in task outlines for communication procedures.
- Greater emphasis on social media.
- A mobile application enabling commuters to receive lane closure information on their smart phones.
- Participation in community events.
- Updated traffic impact information for providers of in-vehicle navigation and mapping systems.
- Annual online surveys to gauge stakeholder and customer group opinions and feedback on the project.

Application of these strategies in other current and future corridor improvement outreach efforts would serve to make these efforts substantially more effective in building and maintaining public support.

Houston Region

The Houston-Galveston Area Council of Governments (HGAC) maintains that "public participation is an integral part of transportation planning." Feedback received from the public ensures that projects

address community needs and the public gains a better understanding of the tradeoffs and constraints associated with transportation planning. A Public Participation Plan was adopted in 2007 that ensures an open planning process that supports early and continued public involvement, timely public notice, and full public access to information regarding key transportation decisions.

The plan provides readers with context for participation in transportation planning. It outlines the organizational structure of the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and how it performs the transportation planning functions. Specifically, the plan discusses the planning documents the MPO creates and how citizens may provide input into the plan. The plan documents the protocol for public involvement based on specific actions. For example, the plan states there is a 30-day public comment period before adoption of the Unified Planning Work Program. The plan presents the minimum public involvement that will occur. In most instances, additional opportunities are available for specific projects or programs.

HGAC recognizes that the public is diverse and therefore obtains information in a variety of ways. HGAC uses various techniques and strategies to support and incorporate public input into the transportation planning and decision-making process. Specific strategies include:

- Identification of stakeholders, both public and private.
- Updating and expansion of a public outreach and education program, including information videos, pamphlets and brochures. Visualization techniques are also used whenever applicable and available.
- Media updates of HGAC activities, including news releases, media alerts and mail-outs.
- Transportation department newsletters, which are distributed to stakeholders, interested parties and the media. These are available on the transportation department's website.
- E-mail. HGAC strives to maximize the use of e-mail to distribute information on major work products. HGAC requests e-mail addresses on public comment forms, the website and meeting sign-in sheets to develop this database.
- The HGAC website.
- Workshops and open houses.
- Surveys and focus groups.

HGAC regularly conducts evaluations of the public participation process. The agency recognizes the value of this exercise as an objective method for measuring the effectiveness and efficacy of various strategies. It can assess the need to discontinue or modify activities that are ineffective, and/or add new initiatives. HGAC uses some or all of the following to elicit comment on public outreach programs:

- Direct mail evaluation surveys of persons on the outreach mailing lists.
- Focus groups.
- Individual interviews.
- Online surveys.
- Comment cards.

IH 45 North—Beltway 8 North to IH 610 (#1 and #7)

This congested segment falls under the project development effort known as the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP). It involves the evaluation of IH 45 North from the US 59/SH 288 interchange to Beltway 8 North, the Hardy Toll Road from IH 610 North Loop to Beltway 8 North, and portions of IH 10, US 59 and SH 288 near downtown.

TxDOT hosted two public meetings on November 15 and 17, 2011, to present the Draft Need and Purpose Statement and the Public Involvement Plan. The meeting used an open-house format. Several exhibits were available at the open house including information about previous studies, the environmental process, the roles of the involved agencies, and project population and employment growth scenarios. A presentation was made periodically throughout the meeting. At this meeting, known as a scoping meeting, the primary purpose was to get input on the purpose and need statement of the project and agency coordination and public involvement plans. The presentation provided information to the attendees on how to access the website where additional information is available.

A final report for the highway component of this project has been approved based on comments received during the previous project development. The comments provided project planners with direction on these four priorities:

- Staying within the existing IH 45 right-of-way between Quitman Street and Cavalcade Street, except at intersections.
- Minimizing the effects on quality-of-life issues of the residents and neighborhoods in the project area.
- Studying the Hardy Toll Road as an alternative route for additional lanes.
- Evaluating the use of tunnels as an alternative in areas of constrained right-of-way.

The draft Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was updated in October 2011. The document includes a table with project milestones that shows the meetings that were held in November and three additional public workshops—two planned in 2012 and one in 2013. A public hearing is anticipated in 2014. The plan indicates that there is a formal 60-day review period for the environmental documents.

Specific goals are identified for achieving public involvement that produces complete information, provides for timely public notice and access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement in the study process. Specific objectives include:

- Establish and maintain widespread community involvement in the study process by providing the media and public with current communications.
- Provide frequent opportunities for the public, including the business community, environmental interest groups and neighborhood organizations, to provide input.
- Be inclusive of individuals in the study area who are or represent minorities and those who have limited English proficiency, low incomes, and special communication or physical requirements. Presentations, meeting notices and communication materials will accommodate persons with special communication needs by providing translations as necessary. All meetings and workshops will be held in locations accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Ensure that all persons who wish to provide input have the opportunity and that all ideas are given fair consideration.
- Emphasize the public involvement program as a learning process for both the public and project team members.
- Use visually informative slides, boards, newsletters, handouts and computer-generated presentations to help communicate technical concepts and retain public interest.
- Consider and respond to public input received during the study process.

In addition to these basic goals, the plan indicates that stakeholder and other miscellaneous meetings will be held on an as-requested basis. Presentations will also be made to other local organizations as

requested. The project team will develop newsletters, media releases and e-mails, and will maintain an updated website.

Overall, the proposed plan contains documented efforts at achieving meaningful public engagement. The project team should also consider the following:

- The website appears to be in its infancy; several sections are not populated with information.
- None of the information presented thus far is available in another language. All of the information should be available in a language common to the affected parties in the corridor. This should be available without the need to contact a project team member.
- The project should seek a more user-friendly domain name. The current domain name, www.ih45northandmore.com, is cumbersome and open to several different interpretations.
- Specific opinion research in the corridor could identify issues and inform messages early in the planning process.
- There is no provision for evaluating the effectiveness of the plan or for providing flexibility to change approaches, if necessary.

US 59 Southwest—IH 610 West to SH 288 (#2)

Improvements to this segment are being reviewed under the North Houston Highway Improvement Project, and public involvement specific to such improvements will be conducted as part of the project.

IH 45 Gulf—IH 10 to IH 610 South (#6)

Improvements to a portion of this segment (IH 45 from IH 10 to SH 288) are being reviewed under the North Houston Highway Improvement Project, and public involvement specific to such improvements will be conducted as part of the project. However, as a complete segment, this particular segment does not have a dedicated webpage, but some public meetings have occurred in the corridor. Involvement is minimal.

US 290—FM 529 to IH 610 (#11)

This segment of congested roadway is included in the My 290 public involvement and communications effort that has been ongoing since October 2006. Considerable resources are dedicated to this planning effort, including a district public information staff person working exclusively on this project and dedicated resources via the TxDOT US 290 program management consultant contract with HNTB Corporation.

A comprehensive website has been developed and is available at www.my290.com. The website makes clear that this planning effort is community driven to address the needs and wants of the community in this corridor. The project is an ambitious plan of reconstruction and new construction, some of which is already underway. The website details the portions that are funded and those that do not have a funding source yet. There is an FAQ section for several categories, including funding, scope, construction, public involvement and the diamond lanes project. The website also provides interactive graphics, which provide stakeholders with details of what crews are building as part of the program's first construction project currently underway. Considerable web space is dedicated to providing an environmental history of the project and why that might be important to travelers and citizens in the corridor. However, this is the only portion of the website that notes a phone number and e-mail address to receive information in Spanish. The website does provide a Spanish translation button on the home page, which translates this page to Spanish, but it is not operable on any of the other pages. The website

also includes animations of how completed interchanges with Beltway 8 and IH 610 will operate when construction is complete. Additionally, traffic cameras at various locations can be accessed through the website.

A project office, located at US 290 and IH 610, also serves as a community resource where individuals may stop in to get information and ask questions. In addition to a project hotline, interested parties can sign up to receive e-mail updates or make a request for a presentation. Project updates are sent via e-mail and news feeds to a database of over 1800 stakeholders. The project also makes use of social media via Twitter.

While the website provides a trove of information, including lane closures and construction updates, it is difficult to find information about previous outreach efforts. Plans are underway to revamp the website to make it easier to navigate.

Opportunities for Greater Effectiveness in Public Engagement in the Houston Region

During the initial assessment for the congested Texas corridors project, a common theme stakeholders voiced was the need for more proactive public engagement. For example, HGAC is required to develop a fiscally constrained transportation plan, both long term and short term. The plans go through a prescribed public involvement process.

The agency also develops a contingency plan, which it would like the public to have input on, but resources do not allow this at this time. The consensus was that more could be done if additional resources were available.

Another concern that was expressed was the lack of coordination within TxDOT:

- In most instances, the TxDOT public information staff is not part of the project development process and is only engaged during project construction. If TxDOT could engage in more focused outreach during the project development process, many issues might be addressed before costly change orders are incurred. Earlier engagement could also help minimize or prevent public criticism and opposition.
- The agency should make a concerted effort to make people aware of how to comment on a project earlier in project development.

San Antonio Region

The San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization (SA-BC MPO) engages in regular public outreach activities when developing and amending the long-range plan (LRP), the transportation improvement plan (TIP) and the unified planning work program (UPWP). A series of TIP public meetings were conducted in February 2012. The MPO provides notification of public input opportunities via the general circulation newspaper, the Spanish-language newspaper, an African American weekly newspaper, paper-copy mail-outs, bi-weekly e-newsletters, quarterly paper-copy newsletters and regular updates to the website. The MPO maintains a database of all interested stakeholders, including elected officials, neighborhood associations, libraries and citizens. Information about opportunities is provided in English and Spanish.

Amendments to the TIP and metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) follow a two-step process that includes presentation of potential changes at the transportation policy board meeting one month, followed by action at the meeting the following month. This allows approximately 30 days for public

comment. Amendments are then voted on at the next board meeting. For the development of a new LRP or TIP, public meetings are held throughout the development of the document as outlined in the MPO's Public Participation Plan. The Public Participation Plan outlines the minimum number of opportunities that will be provided for public involvement; the interest in a proposed project or program may expand the number of opportunities for public input. Moreover, specific projects, such as corridor studies, have individual public participation components including project-specific public participation plans.

SA-BC MPO uses a number of outreach techniques to make citizens aware of engagement opportunities. In addition to standard fare such as newsletters, the website, meeting notices and the contact database, the MPO also uses Facebook, video public service announcements, bus cards, and television and radio public affairs shows to notify interested parties. The MPO also regularly mans exhibit tables at non-transportation-related activities such as health fairs and environmental events to reach a broader audience.

Loop 1604—#23

The Alamo Regional Mobility Authority (Alamo RMA) and the TxDOT San Antonio District have studied various configurations for improvement to this congested roadway. Recently, a Super Street project was completed to improve operations and safety. The Alamo RMA led the Super Street project in conjunction with other transportation partners including TxDOT, the MPO and Bexar County. This effort was divided into three distinct projects for environmental clearance purposes. Two of the projects within this section have received environmental clearance.

As part of that effort, several community meetings were held, including an open house/public meeting on May 25, 2010. The open house included a guide and description of the various potential improvement schematic drawings. The meeting information also included explanations of the Super Street concept and how it might improve conditions in the short term. The information provided showed that this effort was an interim improvement while a larger Loop 1604 Environmental Impact Statement study is underway. The Alamo RMA has produced a YouTube video that is available on its website and that offers a bird's- eye view of how the project will improve operation in this section.

<u>Next Steps</u>

The larger Loop 1604 environmental study is underway. The study will assess possible improvements for the roadway from US 90 (Portranco Road) on the west side of the region to IH 35 North, a total of approximately 35 miles. As part of this effort, numerous opportunities are available for public engagement. A Citizen's Advisory Group is also a part of the outreach effort. The Alamo RMA is making good use of several forms of social media and has produced a training guide on how to use social media to get updates. The website offers considerable information including:

- Newsletters.
- A hotline number.
- Summaries of previous public meetings.
- Alternatives being considered.
- A glossary of terms.
- An FAQ section.
- A "how to get involved" section.

The "how to get involved" section is especially helpful in that anyone can request a group presentation. This shows a significant commitment to the philosophy of meeting with as many stakeholders as possible to educate and inform. Also, from this section interested people can join the mailing list, submit a comment using a form, send a direct e-mail, or see the list of upcoming meetings and events.

The outreach conducted as part of this larger project will be ongoing. The alternatives will impact the part of Loop 1604 on the congested corridors list. The efforts for engagement to date will serve the project well in the future. In fact, the project has already been awarded the "Best Use of Technology for Public Participation 2010" by the American Planning Association Technology Division. As the study moves forward toward a favored alternative, it is likely that interest in the project will increase.

The project team should regularly review feedback and make modifications as necessary.

US 281

The Alamo RMA and TxDOT recently completed a Super Street project on US 281 similar to that completed on Loop 1604. In fact, the US 281 Super Street was the first of its kind in Texas. The Alamo RMA provided extensive information about the interim solution on a dedicated website about the project (http://www.411on281.com/default/index.cfm/us281-superstreet/) and described what to expect as a result of the project.

The project was supported by the community from initiation. A project open house was conducted on June 30, 2009, to get input into the proposed design and to provide a forum to answer questions from the community. Brochures and a PowerPoint presentation were available at the open house. Following the meeting, several types of information were posted to the project website, including:

- A brochure.
- The PowerPoint presentation.
- Visuals showing how intersection approaches would be modified.
- Videos.
- A report on the open house.

There were 285 attendees at this meeting including residents, elected officials, the media and project team members. The project was implemented and is considered a successful interim improvement.

Next Steps

A more extensive outreach effort is being undertaken as part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) being prepared for a longer portion of US 281. This study extends from Loop 1604 north to the Bexar/Comal County line. Since the study was initiated in 2009, a number of public meetings have been held. Materials from each of the meetings are available on a comprehensive website (http://www.411on281.com/us281eis/).

A Citizens Advisory Committee was formed to ensure that community concerns and ideas are heard. The committee is comprised of stakeholder groups that live or work along the US 281 corridor. The committee includes representatives of civic, community and environmental groups, educational institutions, and businesses located within San Antonio. The specific charge of the Citizens Advisory Committee is to:

- Be a voice of the community related to the EIS.
- Provide feedback and input for the development of mobility solutions that are sensitive to transportation, environmental and social needs.
- Create an additional information exchange forum for stakeholders along the US 281 corridor and the Alamo RMA.

The Citizens Advisory Committee has been meeting regularly since 2009 on a number of topics related to the EIS. In addition, members were interviewed in August and September 2010 to assess their opinions regarding the public involvement process. A report of this is available on the website.

The website contains a large amount of information related to the study, including current and archived newsletters, presentations, meeting notes, and related documents. It also has links to upcoming events, news and media stories. It appears that only the paper-copy newsletters are produced in Spanish and English. Translation services are available upon request. The electronic newsletters that are produced in English include a note in Spanish indicating how to receive the information in Spanish: "Para recibir este boletín en español, favor de llamar al 210-495-5256." The electronic versions should be available in Spanish without the extra step of the phone call.

A Speakers Bureau has been established to allow groups to request a presentation about the US 281 study.

As with the Loop 1604 project, this environmental impact study will provide ample opportunities for the public to provide input and for the agencies to receive feedback about the process itself.

Current efforts may need to be intensified as the study progresses. Overall, the efforts are producing meaningful results. The project partners should continue to monitor the feedback and make adjustments as necessary.

IH 35—Loop 353 to US 281

There is no outreach specifically targeted to this congested corridor. However, several projects are planned in the near future for congestion mitigation in this corridor. Presumably these will include outreach to the community.

In addition, in the next three to five years, VIA Metropolitan Transit has plans to complete a transit center west of downtown, with an associated street car system into downtown. This effort, in conjunction with the planned bus rapid transit project on Fredericksburg Road, may lead to congestion mitigation in the congested corridor.

A substantial outreach effort informing travelers of additional travel options should accompany these improvements. VIA has a website, www.smartwaysa.com, that includes information about the long-range comprehensive transportation plan. The website includes YouTube videos, an option to sign up to receive the latest updates, newsletters and meeting notices, and a form to submit comments online. There is also a link to a Facebook page. The website should remain current and be updated on a regular basis to encourage this medium as a way to give and receive information about upcoming projects and outreach activities.

The My 35 planning effort had an award-winning public involvement component. This included the formation of an IH 35 Advisory Committee and four segment committees that reported to the Advisory Committee. This "from the ground up" approach with significant public involvement activities resulted in

a plan that reflects the interests and concerns of citizens through local and regional recommendations for meeting the mobility needs along Texas' IH 35 corridor. The recommendations are documented in the August 2011 IH 35 Corridor Advisory Committee Plan. The IH 35 Advisory Committee and segment committees:

- Examined the corridor challenges from a local perspective.
- Identified possible solutions.
- Offered recommendations to the committee.
- Engaged stakeholders, citizens and community leaders in developing options and alternatives in the San Antonio area.

The Alamo RMA and TxDOT recently launched the "Time for 35" program, which is a Planning and Environmental Linkages study for IH 35, which was a direct result of the recommendations from the My 35 effort. The program will involve community discussion and visions for long-term improvements in the IH 35 corridor from FM 1103 into downtown San Antonio. The joint effort incorporates social media, a web presence, traditional media outreach, constant contact e-newsletters, a technical advisory committee and a community advisory committee into the long-term outreach effort.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Meeting Texas' most critical transportation needs will require substantial resources at a time when annual funding is eroding and transportation priorities are competing with other compelling (and sometimes higher-profile) statewide needs. The public is largely unaware of the "perfect storm" of increasing jobs and population, aging infrastructure, and declining funding projections, as shown by research that puts transportation low on the list of voter concerns. And to further complicate matters, polls show that Americans have little faith that their transportation tax dollars will be spent wisely. In the face of such challenges, building the necessary support for mobility investments will depend largely on helping the public understand two things:

- In general, understanding the urgency and magnitude of the state's transportation needs, and the threat not meeting those poses to our quality of life and economic prosperity.
- More specifically, understanding why selected transportation improvement projects are needed, how they will be paid for, and how those projects will directly benefit them, answering the question, "What's in it for me?"

The public is less likely to support a transportation project for which they see no urgent need or personal benefit. Communicating that need and personal benefit is a fundamental requirement for the agencies responsible for these projects, and doing so effectively will require a more proactive approach than agencies have taken. It will also require going well beyond legally mandated practices. It is not enough to invite the public to *come to us* in order to become involved. Instead, agencies must *go to them*, clearly communicate the needs, provide a means for them to help design the solution, and actively engage them wherever they live, learn, work, pray or play.

Recommendations

Researchers have the following recommendations:

1. Initiate a broad public discussion to raise awareness of the state's mobility crisis and to build public consensus toward solutions. Begin with audience research to determine baseline awareness and understanding levels. Illustrate in personally relevant terms the quality of life and economic implications of ignoring the state's ever-worsening congestion problems.
2. Sustain the discussion through means of an assertive public education campaign to help people understand the magnitude of the state's mobility crisis and the consequences of inaction. Establish the ownership and sponsorship of the campaign through a new partnership under a new name—a broad-based organization composed of local leaders in each region (see #5 below).
3. Develop informative content based upon polling results and project information produced through the Mobility Investment Priorities project. Include information about:

    - Needs and urgency.
    - Corridor solutions.
    - Funding options and impacts on households.

- The link between mobility and jobs/economic prosperity.

- The link between safety, convenience, quality of life and more time for family.

4. Continue polling efforts to ensure that appropriate information is received by appropriate audiences at the appropriate time.
5. Develop a strategy to enlist and continually expand a network of movers and doers at the community level, as well as the local legislative delegations in the four major metropolitan areas, to assist in educating various community segments. As the network expands, some opinion leaders will be obvious, but others less so, and one essential key is to engage those less obvious influencers (the high school football coach, the church pastor, etc.) who in some circles have far more credibility than the mayor or chamber of commerce president. Include influencers such as:

   a. Business leadership.

   b. Civic organization leadership.

   c. Local elected leadership.

   d. Religious leadership.

   e. Other relevant influencers identified through ongoing education campaign management.

6. Develop strategies for the network to have meaningful and ongoing interaction with community segments so that public sentiment accurately reflects the opinions of people who are affected on a daily basis by worsening traffic congestion.
7. Ensure that public engagement efforts at the regional level are adequately funded. Ideally, the public engagement budget should be proportional to the overall project budget. The larger the project, the more people it will affect and the longer that affect will be felt by those people. To provide a frame of reference, in the case of two well-executed public engagement efforts that were studied in this process, 10 percent of the overall project budget was dedicated to public engagement efforts.
8. Expand the use of technology in public engagement. Agencies in each of the four regions are already putting social media to good use in the form of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. A logical and productive expansion of that approach would incorporate strategies such as crowdsourcing, predictive marketing and idea generation. Crowdsourcing and idea generation tools allow for a broader audience to comment and offer ideas on particular solutions. Because these tools are web based, there is a greater opportunity to reach facility users that are impacted by the decisions but are not likely to attend traditional public outreach events. Predictive marketing can allow transportation decision makers to use analytics to assess what issues are hot topics and proactively address them.

APPENDIX: CASE STUDIES: BEST PRACTICES IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Case Study: Imagine Austin

The four principles are an excellent start to understanding and implementing a successful public involvement process. This can be supplemented by a case study that illustrates many of the aforementioned principles. This case study will focus on the Imagine Austin community plan, which the Alliance for Innovation named a national best practice for "Building a Community Vision with Sustained Community Engagement." Imagine Austin is "the City of Austin's comprehensive plan, which defines a vision and framework for how we want the city to grow and develop"[4]. It focuses on developing Austin across a variety of areas, including:

- Land use and transportation.
- Housing and neighborhoods.
- Conservation and the environment.
- Economy.
- City facilities and services.
- Society.
- Creativity.

While the plan is not solely dedicated to transportation planning, two factors make it worth consideration: it provides an excellent example of many of the aforementioned principles, and many of the strategies can transfer seamlessly to transportation projects. The case study is organized by the four overriding best principles provided by the literature.

The Imagine Austin process truly depended on community members to shape and develop the core ideas for the city's plan. The city held four main forums that mined the community for input and integrated the input to create the vision. The forums progressed through four main steps, with each building on the progress of the previous steps:

- The first forum created a general vision of the community's aspirations for the city development over the next 20 years. It developed a strategic vision, built common ground, and produced other informational reports.
- The second forum asked individuals what the city was in the process of becoming. The public completed maps indicating where and how they felt growth should occur and developed future scenarios.
- The third forum asked community members, "What are the choices to change course in the direction of the vision?" In this step, community members evaluated the future scenarios and rated sustainability indicators.
- Finally, the city held working groups to complete surveys and further refine the scenarios. This process illustrates how a program can use public input to develop its plan in a comprehensive manner.

The City of Austin took the information gathered in the forums, organized it and presented it in subsequent forums for the next group to further develop and refine. Throughout the entire process, the city engaged residents and stakeholders in other methods (like public opinion surveys and online engagement) to target specific populations, which will be covered in greater detail below.

[4] http://www.imagineaustin.net/about

Accessible Events

Making an event accessible can often be as easy as considering the needs of the community and making reasonable attempts to accommodate those needs. If agencies do not consider and accommodate these needs, community members will be less likely to attend events and engage in the planning process. Agencies can address this by holding events at convenient times and locations, making accommodations for non-English speakers, marketing the event, and developing online or distance options for participation. The Imagine Austin plan addressed these issues by actively managing and meeting the needs of its community through a variety of strategies.

First, the city developed a strong marketing campaign. The marketing campaign started with the development of a recognizable project brand and an excellent, easy-to-use website. The city asked the community to submit ideas for developing a logo and used a local company to design the logo based on community input. Figures 2 and 3 display the logos the city used for its English and Spanish outreach programs, respectively. The website conveys a variety of information to interested parties: a description of the plan and the proposed document itself, how community members can get involved and provide input, project updates and news, the history of the project, and more.

Figure 2. Imagine Austin Logo.

Figure 3. Imagine Austin Spanish Logo.[5]

Second, the website provides access to parts of the site in Spanish for non-English speakers. While the entire site is not translated into Spanish, the city provides contact information for Spanish-speaking individuals who would like more information. Although providing the entire site in Spanish would have simplified access for Spanish-speaking audiences, the city actively monitored the demographics of those involved and engaged communities that were underrepresented to further integrate them into the planning process.

Third, Imagine Austin provided a large amount of flexibility and variety in its planning events and forums. Austin conducted four separate community planning forums and nine working groups throughout the planning process. These events provided thousands of Austinites with the opportunity to voice their opinions and help the city create a plan for their future. The events were held at various times and locations, and the city encouraged communities to hold meetings at times and locations that were most convenient to the participants.

[5] Translation: "Imagine Austin: Our Plan for the Future."

Finally, the city actively sought out community members through a variety of strategies to increase participation. The city used various social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and e-mail listservs to distribute its message. Austin used door hangers, flyers and mailers—including inserts in newspapers, utility bills and newsletters—to target underrepresented populations. The city also engaged important stakeholders through several meetings and made speakers available to meet with interested community groups.

This high level of flexibility and accessibility granted Austinites the ability to play integral roles in the development of their city plan. In all, community members contributed more than 16,000 ideas for the city's plan. This incredible achievement is one worth emulating, and the following section discusses how Austin kept individuals interested and engaged in the process.

Engaging Interactions

How did the City of Austin keep the attendees engaged in the discussion and gather 16,000 opinions from thousands of community members? To accomplish this feat, they used a variety of strategies to make the process interesting, and ensured that contributors knew their opinions were valuable and would influence the planning process.

Online Interactions

The first strategy the city used was developing an engaging and user-friendly website that provided multiple ways for individuals to learn about the plan and provide input. The website is very well designed and conveys a large amount of information in an interesting fashion through timelines; YouTube videos; visual aids, like maps and charts; and the use of engaging language (plain diction and inclusive phrases like "*our* plan" or "how *we* want the city to grow"). It also has a tool for community members to rank their priorities and provide feedback throughout the planning process. The website provides an effective central information hub for individuals to access information and understand how they can get involved.

In-Person Interactions

The City of Austin also provided engaging tools and interesting interaction opportunities throughout the planning meetings and forums. For example, it used maps (some of which were later posted on the website) to let community members express their preferences for where and how growth should occur. Figure 4 illustrates community members looking over some maps at one of the community forums. The forums often included opinion polls where individuals could share their thoughts and opinions on the issues. The attendees collaborated to produce development objectives and evaluate planning scenarios. They prioritized objectives and helped shape the vision for the city. The entire process was designed to bring in stakeholders and community members and get them engaged in the process of planning for the city. The end result was a plan that the city collaboratively developed.

Figure 4. Imagine Austin Community Forum.

Multi-platform Strategies

The City of Austin used a wide variety of strategies to engage and collaboratively work with community members to develop plans for future development. Many of these strategies were discussed in the previous two sections.

First, as mentioned, the website that Austin developed provided a variety of ways for users to learn about the plan and provide their input. The YouTube videos on the site are well produced and informative. The plan is available on the website in a user-friendly format. The website displays photographs of participants who attended events and expressed their opinions on white boards (as seen in Figure 5). An interactive timeline displays information on how the plan progressed over the years and describes major milestones. The availability of a wide variety of tools for individuals to learn increases participation and enables user-generated content through a variety of mediums.

Figure 5. Imagine Austin Release Party Participants.

Austin also used the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter to disseminate information and receive feedback. As of this writing, its Facebook page has 2164 “likes” and a relatively active user base. Figure 6 is a screenshot from the Imagine Austin Facebook page as of December 2011. Users regularly commented on stories or information that the city posted. The Imagine Austin Twitter page has 916 followers and 735 tweets. According to the website, the e-mail listserv had 2372 subscribers. City

planners felt that social networking and the website were very successful at disseminating information to a very large audience and receiving a large amount of feedback.

Figure 6. Imagine Austin's Facebook Page.

As a caveat, it is important to note that while technology played a key role in Austin's success, technology alone cannot provide success. Technology is a tool that can enable success but is not a magic bullet for public outreach. Agencies must use technology in a manner that is consistent with the four principles: making it accessible to users, making it interesting and engaging, using a variety of technological options, and ensuring that their technological efforts are outcome oriented. Having a Facebook page, Twitter feed or e-mail listserv that is poorly managed will not improve public outreach and may in fact make it worse.

The city used more informational outlets than just those online. They also communicated through many of the more traditional means, like community meetings, forums, stakeholder meetings, flyers and mailers. At the end of the process, the city hosted a release party for the plan, which was well attended and documented on its website through a YouTube video and photographs posted on its Flickr page.

The city also experimented with innovative, non-electronic engagement methods—some of which were successful and some of which were not as successful. One of the most successful strategies the city used was a "meeting in a box." The meeting in a box was a collection of informational materials that allowed a member of the public to take the information and present the information to a community group. It included materials for the individuals to provide input based on the information they heard in the presentation. As a side note, the meeting in a box was developed collaboratively with a class from the University of Texas planning department. Members of the Imagine Austin program cited the meeting in a box as one of the most successful strategies to target groups that had been underrepresented in the process.

Another strategy the City of Austin developed was what they called "speak week." The city was disappointed in the amount and diversity of turnout in the first round of forums, so it developed a strategy to increase the number and type of attendees engaged. This specific method was a week of taking the message out into the community in areas with high pedestrian traffic. City representatives brought informational materials and interactive boards that enabled individuals to design streets the way they felt best. This method engaged a group of people that may have never been exposed to the other forms of outreach and was successful at reaching a high number of community members.

Another method the city used that was very successful was placing a multi-page insert in local newspapers. The insert had information about the plan, maps, and a page that community members could cut out and mail in or deliver to the planning office to provide input. The insert also included the website address for individuals who wished to submit their input electronically. Incredibly, the city received more than 200,000 responses from the insert in the newspapers.

Altogether, the use of both traditional and innovative communication methods enabled hundreds of thousands of Austinites from diverse backgrounds to be informed about the planning process and provide their input to shape the city's future.

Outcome-Oriented Process

Imagine Austin is a clear example of a project that went above and beyond the legal requirements and collaborated with community members throughout the process to make decisions that reflect their community's values. It was obvious to all viewers that the process was not one that was made solely by bureaucrats with a cursory effort to receive comments after all the decisions had already been made. The City of Austin developed a public involvement program that genuinely used citizen input to shape the decisions made.

Some of the aspects of the Imagine Austin project also sought to integrate the community in a "soft" but significant manner. This occurred through small touches, like hosting a launch party for the plan where community members came to celebrate and express their views on the project. The launch party integrated many of the aspects that make Austin unique: a local band played music, the city provided local food, and the event had activities like face painting for children. These sentimental outreach efforts go a long way toward building a sense of communal cohesion and shared destiny.

The Imagine Austin project was successful in its public outreach efforts in part due to its commitment to genuine engagement. It clearly dedicated a significant amount of resources and time to make the process community led. In all, the city spent $1.7 million on contracted expenses and purchasing for the program, and spent that amount again in employee hours. It involved the community throughout the entire process and made sure to use the input in a deep and meaningful manner. The city used "soft"

touches to build a sense of cohesion and shared vision for the project. All of these aspects contributed to a project that was outcome oriented and eventually successful.

Measuring Performance

The Imagine Austin program had both self-imposed goals and goals that the Austin City Council developed for the program. The City Council laid out three goals for the program:

1. **Diversity of opinions**—Engage the entire community, not just groups that are traditionally involved in the planning process.
2. **Sustainability**—Ensure the developed plan is a sustainable vision for Austin.
3. I**mplementation**—The plan must not be a theoretical exercise but must be actionable.

In addition to these three goals, the planning department established two more goals. It wanted to ensure that:

1. Participation was representative of Austin's demographics and not heavily skewed toward or away from any group of people.
2. The program had a sufficient level of participation. Therefore, the program established goals for the total number of individuals from which it received input.

In the end, the City of Austin reached its goal of total numbers of participation but did not receive an entirely representative sample, despite proactive attempts to engage underrepresented populations. The planning department did not develop quantifiable goals to gauge its success at meeting the three goals the city council laid out, and did not measure its efforts at achieving them. As a result, it is unclear if the plan was adequately diverse, sustainable or actionable.

This may have been a result of a general unease with too many numerical or quantifiable goals because the city felt it did not want to have the feeling of "checking off a box" when trying to reach goals. It wished to have a more in-depth public involvement process and felt that too many measures would restrict its ability to be successful.

While these concerns are legitimate and all approaches are unique, the city may have had more success had it developed stronger measures that tracked inputs, outputs and outcomes throughout the process. Had it tried these strategies, it may have been able to improve the targeted outreach and been able to allocate more funding toward the most cost-effective strategies. At the end of the process, the city may have been able to point out successes more strongly in quantifiable terms, and identify more clearly areas where it did not perform as well. It might have been able to better celebrate its past successes and develop strategies to improve its future planning efforts.

Nonetheless, the Imagine Austin process was successful at achieving some of its goals and received a large amount of input from hundreds of thousands of Austinites.

Summary

This case study demonstrates that—with an appropriate level of care—public involvement can be a successful endeavor that enables a community to make decisions that reflect its values and shape its destiny. It can build a sense of cohesion and trust between the local government and its citizens. Public involvement can, at first glance, seem like a daunting and inconvenient task to planners and agencies: a project must be held up to make time for a perfunctory exercise without meaning or merit.

Transportation agencies can achieve these benefits by adhering to the four principles outlined above: making events accessible, making interactions engaging, providing a multi-platform strategy, and ensuring that all efforts are outcome oriented. The City of Austin's Imagine Austin project provides an excellent example of a public outreach effort that integrated the four principles into its process and, as a result, was extremely successful. The city may improve its future planning efforts by making greater use of performance measures.

Case Study: I-69 Driven by Texans

As suggested by the title, the I-69 public involvement effort sought to ensure that the project development process was driven by the citizens, motorists and property owners who would be affected by it. The effort adhered closely to the four principles outlined earlier—accessible events, engaging interactions, multi-platform strategies and an outcome-oriented process.

Under the guidance of an Advisory Committee, the I-69 segment committees were formed for each section of the proposed path of the roadway. In assisting the process, TxDOT staff afforded these committees considerable latitude in determining which outreach strategies would fit best with their perceived local needs. The committees were empowered to serve as liaisons between their communities and the department.

To date, the work of the segment committees has gone so far as to discuss—in concept—certain highway improvements and project priorities in preparation to begin the planning, environmental study and development of I-69 in Texas. Because all such discussion is clearly conceptual, public outreach to all local communities is required to solidify direction and advance the I-69 mission, over time, toward location and construction decisions. Figures 7 and 8 show materials developed for public outreach.

Figure 7. Poster Developed for I-69 Driven by Texans.

Figure 8. Flyer Developed for I-69 Driven by Texas.

In meetings during March 2011, segment committees discussed the need for public outreach, feedback and input, and suggested both materials and methods that could facilitate discussion with local communities. The resulting outreach plan reflected that input, along with the experience and expertise of TxDOT communication professionals and consultants retained to implement the public outreach program. Input from the committees identified the following as relatively universal among segments:

- Most critical needs:
  - **Information:** Committees expressed the need for up-to-date information from TxDOT, with some reticence to do any outreach until they had current facts and figures on I-69 status.
  - **Public outreach:** Committees seemed united in their belief that good public outreach is required. Initially, they differed somewhat on both timing and preferred methods.
  - **Myth busting:** Several members voiced the challenge that, as soon as a conceptual idea is presented (e.g., potential highway improvements and relief routes), people think that the conceptual line on a map is a certain route even though it is far from decided. This causes confusion and concern. Members were also challenged by the misperception that the proposed I-69 system is related to the I-69/Trans-Texas Corridor (I-69/TTC).
- Most critical issues:
  - **Funding:** Who pays? How does funding work?
  - **Relief routes:** This is a topic pertinent north to south, with special resonance in the Houston area, where stakeholders want to prepare for the onslaught of trucks caused by growing goods movement. The relief route discussion also includes communities who want to be near the route for economic development and those who want to be far from it to preserve property and business interests.
  - **Timing:** When will something happen? When will construction start?

- Key Information as defined by I-69 segment committee members:

  - **Existing alignment:** This project calls for using the footprint of existing highways to the greatest extent possible to develop I-69 to minimize impact to existing businesses and property owners.
  - **Conceptual nature:** All potential highway improvements and relief routes (and projects) are, at this point, only conceptual. No decisions have been made about any final route or project prioritization. The public will have opportunities to comment on specific plans as they are developed.
  - **Community benefits:** There has not been a highway project of this magnitude and significance in the history of our state. I-69 Texas will offer a host of community benefits, including economic growth, improved mobility and connectivity, and greater highway safety.

- I-69 segment committee public outreach goals:

  - Significantly increase the knowledge and understanding of the value of I-69 Texas, thereby increasing support among stakeholders in all segments of the project.
  - Raise the comfort level of local stakeholders concerning the potential impacts of I-69 Texas in their communities through proactive information presentations and ample input opportunities.

- I-69 segment committee public outreach objectives:

  - Develop and implement five effective public outreach programs, one for each I-69 segment, as measured by completion of an approved scope of work and pre- and post-program research as approved by TxDOT.
  - Gain visible support from community leaders along the I-69 route, as measured by the number of key stakeholders who publicly support the project.
  - Create a public outreach template that can be used repeatedly over the many years of I-69 Texas development, as measured by detailed project reports that can be passed to future teams.

- I-69 segment committee public outreach strategies:

  - **I-69 website:** An I-69 website was established for content related to the information and activities of I-69 advisory and segment committees.
  - **Printed materials:** Several formats of printed materials were developed to provide information to the public and allow them to make comments and return by mail if preferred over web commenting. Printed materials are available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese.
  - **I-69 video:** An I-69 video was developed about the history of I-69 and describes the I-69 Texas route, the citizen committee process and the benefits of I-69 Texas. This video is available on the I-69 Driven by Texans website and the TxDOT YouTube site, and was shown during open houses and other public involvement activities.
  - **QR codes:** QR codes were printed on all hard-copy materials and, when scanned, direct the user to the I-69 Driven by Texans website. The codes were used on display boards at the open houses and other public involvement activities so attendees could view the website on

their mobile devices. QR codes are a way to reach a more diverse audience and give the public information on the go.

- **Community meetings:** The committee members spoke with various groups in their communities, either at regularly scheduled functions such as city council and Rotary Club meetings or at functions scheduled just to present on I-69. The committee members provided printed materials to their audiences and used PowerPoint presentations to provide information on I-69. Additionally, staff provided committee members with maps, other materials such as display boards, and staff assistance as requested.
- **Open houses:** Segment committee members were central to the open houses, informing the public about the project and answering questions. Staff were responsible for the logistics of the events, but most importantly, the committee members served as the hosts. Open houses were held in the late afternoon through early evening (e.g., 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.) to accommodate various work schedules. Open houses used the following:
    - An I-69 video station was available at the open houses so attendees could view a video discussing the history and importance of I-69 Texas.
    - The Segment Two open houses included conceptual aerial maps; citizens left a colored, numbered dot on the map where they wished to leave a comment and then completed a comment card that was numbered, corresponding to the colored dot. Citizens left their comment cards on a comment wall displayed at each open house so they could read each other's comments, as requested by the committee.
    - Comment areas were set up so attendees could review information and leave comments or take home postage-paid comment cards to return later. The comment areas included a comment wall for posting comments and a comment table, which included brochures, FAQ leaflets, comment cards and computers so citizens could browse the I-69 Driven by Texans website and make online comments.
    - Map stations varied by segment, depending on what each committee liked to show, but included their segment recommendation maps such as :
        - The highways the committee recommends serve as I-69.
        - Important connecting facilities to I-69.
        - Recommended relief routes.
        - Priority projects.
        - Conceptual maps for the public to draw on and write comments.

- **Media:** TxDOT Media Relations has an extensive list of local media that receive news advisories prior to each segment committee meeting. This list was used to inform local media of segment committee public involvement activities. TxDOT's Communications staff coordinated with district public information officers on local media coverage for open houses. Committee members also discussed using public service announcements to inform their communities about open houses.
- **Social media:** Segment committee meetings, open houses and the public involvement period were conveyed using TxDOT's Facebook page and district Twitter feeds. Segment committee members also used their own personal and business social media pages to post information. Using both traditional and newer, innovative tools for public outreach reached a broader, more diverse audience, making for a more meaningful public involvement experience for various demographics.

Summary

I-69 Driven by Texans is a model public involvement initiative. It goes well beyond the legally required steps, engages people at a grassroots level, and involves people in a way that empowers them and gives them meaningful ownership of the project development process. In addition, I-69 Driven by Texans exemplifies the four principles of effective public involvement, as illustrated by these brief examples:

- **Accessible events**—Presentations, discussions and open houses are held at multiple locations at different times of the day; information is shared at specially called gatherings and at regularly scheduled meetings of various community organizations. Information is also accessible in the sense that it is presented in four languages.
- **Engaging interactions**—Segment committee members are central to the information-sharing process. Staff members handle logistics, but it is the committee members who actually host open houses and other discussions.
- **Multi-platform strategies**—The program employs a wide range of techniques and tools, including both traditional and social media, and both one-way and two-way communication.
- **An outcome-oriented process**—By virtue of its design, I-69 Driven by Texans focused on a specific goal: ensuring that the project development process was driven by the citizens, motorists and property owners who would be affected by it. Involving people at the grassroots levels ensured that public input would be both meaningful and credible. By incorporating that input into the development process, TxDOT can demonstrate a clear and accurate illustration of public understanding and support, and elected representatives have the benefit of that understanding and support when considering policy and funding decisions related to the project.