

ENGAGE COMMUNITIES IN REGIONAL DECISION-MAKING

Community engagement presents a complex challenge for metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). Although it is a fundamental responsibility, the “softer side of planning” sometimes gets short shrift from agencies that are more technically focused. Transportation planning and decision-making processes involve many different bodies at many different levels of government, making it difficult to involve the public in a way that does not make them feel frustrated. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to community engagement, but there are some universal principles:

- Involve the public early and often in decision-making, not just to inform.
- Be honest about what the MPO does and does not do.
- Put transportation planning within the larger regional context.
- Make inclusive involvement a top priority and go beyond the “usual suspects.”
- Use new technologies when appropriate, but don’t underestimate the power of low-tech tools.

Regardless of the means through which the public is engaged, the fact that citizens are providing input is an expression of their desire to make their community a better place.

As described in the guidebook’s appendix, MPO 101, federal regulations prescribe basic levels of public involvement. Historically, they were limited to the method and timing of public notice of meetings, approval of planning milestones and defining subsets of the public that must be offered avenues for involvement. The 2005 federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU and the ensuing 2007 regulations imposed new requirements, such as the development of an MPO Public Participation Plan and offered guidance on techniques for engagement. It is still possible, though, for an MPO to fully adhere to federal requirements without going much beyond the traditional public notice or public hearing and without reaching significant portions of the public.

This chapter describes the comprehensive actions that an innovative MPO can take to create an effective two-way street of communication with the public. This feedback loop requires clear demonstration of how public input is integrated into the regional planning process. Regardless of the means through which the public is engaged, the fact that citizens are providing input is an expression of their desire to make their community a better place. Among the actions an MPO can take to give that energy a productive outlet are:

- **Make involvement engaging**
- **Reach out physically and virtually**
- **Be innovative with high-tech engagement tools**
- **Support community engagement and organizing**

MAKE INVOLVEMENT ENGAGING

Engaging the public on regional planning is especially tricky because it encompasses a large territory over long time horizons, when most people are primarily concerned with what happens in their own communities in the near term. The task is made doubly difficult when planning documents are dense and filled with jargon and meetings are conducted as a one-way conversation that spout information. MPO's challenge, then, is to make the discussion interesting, accessible, meaningful — and even fun.

The opportunity

Many planners and officials see public engagement as a necessary evil. They understand why it must be done but view it as a perfunctory task without much benefit other than allowing a few people to vent frustrations, after which the same decisions are made. While it is easy to make this a self-fulfilling prophecy, with a little energy and creativity you can bring a diverse range of voices to bear on making your plans significantly better and with the kind of public support that will ensure they are implemented.

Interactive community engagement allows participants to learn experientially alongside staff and officials and is much more useful and fun than conventional public meetings. Good public engagement breaks down barriers, demystifies the process, decodes the acronyms and reflects the values and needs of constituencies ranging from freight carriers to bus riders, business owners, health care providers and beyond.

Putting it into practice

Several MPOs use scenario planning as a primary venue for public involvement, whether for specific corridor planning or long-range visioning (see Focus Area 1 for more information on Scenario Planning). Educational programs, interactive meetings and other low-cost and low-tech techniques exist to “open the curtain” on the regional transportation planning process. This section covers several specific techniques, including mapping activities, role-playing games, fiscal decision-making simulations, planning workshops and participatory exercises in prioritizing projects.

Cultivating an ongoing cadre of informed citizen “leaders.” [The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments \(TPB\)](#) combines many of these elements into one ongoing initiative, the Community Leadership Institute (CLI), started in 2006. The MPO's Public Participation Plan explains the framework for the CLI as a pyramid of three constituencies:

- *The Interested* — defined as nearly everyone, since as a transportation user, everyone has at least some kind of “interest” in transportation;
- *The Informed* — those who have some knowledge of how transportation investments are made but choose not to provide input; and
- *The Involved* — those few who actually participate in some way via a public meeting, public comment or other venue.¹

1 www.mwcog.org/clrp/public/plan.asp; www.mwcog.org/clrp/resources/ParticipationPlan_FinalDraft_Dec2007.pdf

The CLI aims to move people and stakeholder groups up the pyramid through education on how the transportation planning process works and motivate them to get more involved by highlighting the importance of transportation's relationship to regional quality of life.¹

For each day-and-a-half CLI workshop, roughly two dozen individuals are invited who already are somewhat active in their communities, though not necessarily in the transportation arena. Attendees learn about transportation and land-use issues facing the region through presentations and exercises, such as placing stickers representing housing and job growth on a map, or drawing needed transportation infrastructure with colored markers.

In a fiscal simulator, participants use poker chips to allocate available funding among transportation priorities as a way to learn about constraints and trade-offs. Role-playing exercises have participants posing as public officials or various stakeholders working to solve a specific transportation challenge.

More than 200 residents have participated over the last eight years. The MPO conducts special, themed workshops for older adults in concert with AARP and for MPO board members who are new and/or from smaller jurisdictions. MPO staff regularly communicate with and solicit input from program alumni and the program's reach is broadened when participants in turn communicate with their own networks and interest groups.²



Source: www.mwcog.org/transportation/activities/cli/

The **Chattanooga–Hamilton County/North Georgia Transportation Planning Organization (Chattanooga TPO)** developed its latest Regional Transportation Plan (2040 RTP) update using a public outreach and participation plan that provided multiple avenues for generating feedback from the general public and key transportation stakeholder groups and task forces. The 2040 RTP includes a “Community to Region” performance framework, which looks at three geographic scales: (1) “Within Community,” emphasizing safe, multimodal connections to community assets, which advance livability and quality of life; (2) “Community to Region” to support strategic multimodal connections between individual communities and regional economic centers; and (3) “Region to Region” to emphasize intermodal improvements and mobility across the state and the nation. This enables different project evaluations at each scale to mitigate conflict among stakeholders who advocate for local, community-oriented investment approaches and other stakeholders who advocate for “big-ticket” regional projects.³

The public engagement outreach in producing the 2040 RTP, in all, included questionnaires, leadership symposiums, stakeholder focus groups, public meetings, topic-based workshops, public hearings and social

1 www.mwcog.org/transportation/activities/cli/default.asp

2 www.mwcog.org/transportation/activities/cli/alumni.asp

3 www.ampo.org/ampo-webinar-to-highlight-2013-award-winners-monday-december-16-2013/ and www.chcrpa.org/2040RTP/CHCRPA_2040RTP_Vol-1.pdf



Source: Chattanooga TPO 2040 RTP, page 43

media. All told, there were more than 1,000 public interactions resulting from these outreach efforts. There were four general public meetings (each held in different geographic locations), five topic-based workshops (on calls for projects, climate change adaptation, transit aspirations, bicycle and pedestrian design and performance measures) and two detailed survey questionnaires to gain broad-based input on transportation issues that received 510 responses.

The Chattanooga TPO highlighted public meetings through social media and in newspapers, with specific outreach to Spanish-language newspapers. These public meetings were held in an area with a mainline transit route and the TPO made personal visits to the representatives of people with disabilities, minority leadership organizations and specific neighborhood associations to discuss the transportation process with representatives of each of these groups identified and appointed to the plan's Core Technical Team and Community Advisory Committee. These individuals helped with disseminating information, including the two surveys, which resulted in much greater success in obtaining representation in all areas of the TPO than with the 2035 Long-Range Transportation Plan outreach.¹

Learn how the **Missoula MPO** in **Montana** used innovative public involvement techniques to create an informative and ultimately productive, planning process in the full case study at the end of this chapter in the **Innovation in Action** section.

1 www.chcrpa.org/2040RTP/CHCRPA_2040RTP_Vol-1.pdf

REACH OUT PHYSICALLY AND VIRTUALLY

MPOs can be creative, engaging and innovative with public involvement, but still not reach many of the people who are most affected by transportation decisions and investments. Thankfully, there are more and more ways to get a message out and get feedback in and many of them come at low or no cost to an MPO. New technologies present ample opportunities for the innovative MPO to engage more people and get better results.

> The opportunity

Social media is an emerging tool for public involvement in transportation and demonstrates a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. To a certain extent, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other platforms allow MPOs to let others inform and engage the public for them. This benefit derives from the very essence of social media: the ease in sharing information across existing networks of people and the ease with which people can then engage in follow-up discussion about a particular piece of information. Both of these qualities of social media can be a blessing and a curse to an MPO that is trying to achieve ambitious regional goals.

Even if board members and staff are very familiar with using social media in their personal lives, the prospect of beginning or expanding the use of social media as a work function may be scary. Part of this is because MPOs fundamentally are bureaucracies and bureaucracies and social media are not natural fits. Bureaucracies by nature involve technical information, complex and often slow decision-making processes and hierarchies of message approval. Social media, on the other hand, thrives on speed and brevity and requires no credentials to engage in discussion. The result can thus be a profusion of information and dialogue that is at best incomplete and at worst inaccurate. It is easy for a public organization to appear embarrassingly archaic, or to suddenly have a public relations nightmare on its hands with consequences for both it and its member jurisdictions and agencies. The challenge, then, is to access the many benefits of social media while guarding against the pitfalls.

That may involve significant staff time, but the payoff in terms of greater reach and broader engagement is worth the effort, if carried out wisely. This section will present examples of how to do just that.



Community outreach in Eden Prairie, MN was especially targeted at reaching recent immigrant families. Photo courtesy of Twin Cities LISC.

MPOs use social media in a range of ways, from simply establishing content sections or online forums on Web pages for planning documents and other news, to maintaining a robust presence on various social media platforms with active profiles that push out original content, share information from others, facilitate or engage in discussions and gather input via surveys and other tools. MPOs must be careful not to become overly reliant on social media, as many demographic and stakeholder groups are not as active as others on these platforms and may therefore be neglected. At the same time, online and social media can encourage and allow engagement with audiences who are less likely to be reachable by public notices, such as younger residents, or whose work schedule won't allow for public meetings.

Putting it into practice

Using Facebook and Twitter as a forum for discussion of regional issues. The **Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization** uses Facebook and Twitter as discussion forums for transportation planning and development issues, in the context of its long-range plan update. The MPO's social media coordinator makes decisions about social media content, relating all posts and online conversations to the major policy provisions, goals and objectives of the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan as well as relevant current event topics related to the MPO's work.

The Nashville Area MPO's website features a "Stay Involved" page with links to social media channels, a quick list of public involvement documents (including the Public Participation Plan), a calendar of upcoming events, a communications sign-up form, request forms for MPO staff to speak during events and additional links to helpful resources. The MPO is also working on another web-based tool to allow the public to crowdsource issues with the transportation system that will be used as input into the RTP update. The MPO's Twitter feed is followed by partners and advocates, media and trade publications, industry experts, bloggers, arts and culture feeds and politicians, among others.¹ In a short period of time, the MPO's social media presence grew to more than 3,300.

The MPO staff works hard to manage its reputation through both traditional and social media, recognizing that a failure to engage on social platforms would cede the conversation about regional transportation to others, explains the MPO's social media coordinator, Mary Beth Ikard. "Institutions used to control their own reputation — now the stakeholders do. It's not what you say about yourself that matters as much as what your constituencies say about you."²

Making use of the full suite of media platforms. **MetroPlan Orlando**, the MPO for the Orlando region, developed in 2011 a detailed social media plan (updated in 2012).³ It's notable not just for its guidelines for using social media, but in describing how they are to be integrated into overall public involvement efforts. The plan sets clear objectives and strategies for frequency of communication, number of followers and potential partners. As part of its long-range plan update, MetroPlan Orlando also used platforms such as Flickr, Veoh and YouTube to disseminate information using video, photographs, charts, graphs, renderings and animation.⁴

1 http://nashvillempo.org/stay_involved/

2 www.cfte.org/uploads/cke_documents/Mary-Beth-Ikard-PPT-5-15-12-3-.ppt

3 www.metroplanorlando.com/files/view/public-involvement-plan-adopted-5-9-2012.pdf

4 <http://metroplanorlando.com/files/view/2040-Irtp-public-involvement-report.pdf>

A social media presence is just one element of the innovations made by the **Indian Nations Council of Governments (INCOG)** in the **Tulsa, Oklahoma** area. Learn about the innovative approach INCOG used with an old bus by reading the full case study at the end of this chapter in the **Innovation in Action** section.

BE INNOVATIVE WITH HIGH-TECH ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Innovative MPOs are taking advantage of new technologies and software programs to educate and engage the public. While some carry a high price tag, others use lower-cost and publicly available resources.

> The opportunity

High-tech participatory tools can show real-time results and create an effective two-way connection between decision-makers and residents. Instant electronic polling, visualization and other graphic renderings allow the public to imagine what projects look like when completed, the effects of policies to increase density or target investments to particular corridors, or the impact of poor street design on the safety of pedestrians, drivers and others who use the road. The biggest impact of new visualization techniques has been at the project level, where project alternatives can be realistically displayed and impacts on safety, congestion and quality of life clearly simulated. This is why the most recent federal guidance for MPOs specifically called out “visualization” as a recommended practice. MPOs can benefit from the research that others have done on visualization options, including the resources listed at the end of this chapter.¹

MPOs are also finding themselves at the locus of the new trend of “benevolent hacking” – the phenomenon of third-parties, often technologically savvy and civic-minded companies, organizations or even individuals, developing ways to combine public data and new technologies to develop work-arounds to frustrating public processes. This includes crowdsourcing ideas for civic improvements or redevelopment,² enhancing government transparency, improving the usability of public data for citizen watchdogs³ and helping residents use or improve public services (like transportation systems).⁴ The innovative MPO should find ways to assist in these efforts without compromising data security or playing favorites among private enterprises.

Regardless of how an MPO chooses to use technology, staff and officials should keep in mind that technology is simply a means to an end and not an end in itself. High-tech engagement techniques do not replace in-person engagement and don’t add much value if not presented in a way that informs, compels useful action or invites a two-way conversation. A common criticism of public



Source: www.qrcodepress.com/qr-code-allows-smartphone-users-to-adopt-a-tree-in-d-c/857733/

1 <http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/archive/conferences/2008/statewide/pdf/davis.pdf>; www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/congestion_management_process/cmp_visualization_tools/visualizationtools.pdf

2 <http://greatergreaterwashington.org/post/16389/new-websites-crowdsource-development-ideas/>

3 <http://opencityapps.org/>

4 <https://www.waze.com/>; http://developer.wmata.com/Application_Gallery

engagement initiatives is that they increase knowledge of an issue and the desire of the public to see change, but then provide no tools or structures through which the public can take action. MPOs must be wary of creating such a dynamic.

Putting it into practice

Using online tools to visualize the effects of policies and investment priorities. The **Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)** is one of the largest and most comprehensive regional planning entities in the country, dealing with transportation, environment, natural resources, watershed planning, housing, economic development and health and human services. In 2009 the agency began a multi-year process to develop its comprehensive regional plan, called GO TO 2040,¹ that would see sustained public engagement from start to finish.²

During the initial phase, which lasted four months and was dubbed Invent the Future, CMAP sought public input on the scenarios that would be developed and tested. The showcase element was MetroQuest, an interactive tool that allows users to experiment with different combinations of variables such as development patterns and transportation options and immediately see predicted outcomes. CMAP used the online tool at public meetings, on its website and at kiosks in high-traffic locations throughout the metropolitan area. In the course of this phase, an estimated 1,500 people attended workshops; 14,000 people completed a kiosk session; and 2,800 people filled out surveys at fairs or festivals. The MetroQuest GO TO 2040 website had approximately 10,000 unique visitors.³ This level of public involvement was unprecedented for the agency and resulted in an incredibly comprehensive and innovative long-range plan. For more discussion of the plan, see the CMAP case study featured in Focus Area 7.

Shaping proposals on the fly with instant polling. Other MPOs such as the **Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization (Miami-Dade MPO)** have made use of new technologies for instant polling at public meetings or over the Internet. Participants are presented with a ballot or list of items to consider and are asked to record their preference either with a hand-held device, a telephone or through the Internet.⁴ The results are anonymous and can be displayed instantaneously at the event or on a website. Options include keypad polling (using specialized keypads normally provided by a third-party consultant), cell-phone polling and Web-based polling.

Such technology helps to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to express their sentiments without the need to speak in public, while providing immediate results to catalyze further discussion. The Miami-Dade MPO used instant polling at public meetings during the development of its 2035 long-range transportation plan and the 2040 plan update. The devices enabled the agency to obtain valuable public feedback during the public involvement process on preferences for different proposed projects, prioritization and support of proposed policies and support for specific plan elements.⁵

1 <https://www.planning.org/research/arts/briefingpapers/engagement.htm>

2 www.dot.state.mn.us/publicinvolvement/pdf/casestudies/HEV-chicagogoto2040-final.pdf

3 www.cmap.illinois.gov/about/2040/supporting-materials/process-archive/scenario-evaluation/invent;www.dot.state.mn.us/publicinvolvement/pdf/casestudies/HEV-chicagogoto2040-final.pdf

4 Photos showing the MDMPO's outreach are available at https://www.facebook.com/miamidademppo/photos_stream.

5 <http://mpotransportationoutreachplanner.org/strategies/age/youth/129/instant-polling-technology>

SUPPORT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN ENGAGING THEIR CONSTITUENCIES

Most MPOs control their own public engagement and outreach efforts, but in recent years several innovative MPOs made grants to local community organizations to lead or coordinate public engagement. This strategy can engender more authentic ownership of the process and build the capacity of local groups to understand and influence transportation issues rather than just being involved once decisions have already been made.

The opportunity

All MPOs have some kind of citizen advisory group that provides regular input to staff activities and board decisions. Several MPOs have moved beyond the general citizen advisory group to create community engagement teams that are chartered to focus on specific issues or interests of importance and empowered to have meaningful involvement in MPO programs and decisions.

MPO transportation plans are made up primarily of projects that originate at the local level. A lack of public involvement in shaping those projects at the local level can lead to blow-ups when they are included in the regional plan, causing headaches for the MPO and frustration among citizens who feel excluded from the process until it is too late to provide meaningful input. Some MPOs try to ensure good citizen engagement for potentially controversial local projects by providing grants and expertise to local jurisdictions in developing project concepts. This can be especially important for constituencies that are traditionally under-represented or disadvantaged.

Putting it into practice

Creating your own “watchdog” to support implementation. To create its award-winning safety plan and a bicycle/pedestrian plan, the **Houma-Thibodaux Metropolitan Planning Organization (HTMPO)** in southern Louisiana formed the South Central Safety Community Partnership. The coalition includes representatives from across the region bringing together law enforcement and safety officials, business leaders, transportation engineers, emergency responders, local non-profits and school representatives. The HTMPO is one of the smaller MPOs in Louisiana and unique among MPOs of any size in having a stand-alone safety plan. It incorporates both infrastructure and behavioral safety strategies such as funding a regional DWI testing mobile unit and holding road safety workshops and audits.¹ Since the safety plan was adopted in 2011, more than 45 percent of the transportation safety priorities are being funded and implemented.

A subset of the Partnership meets quarterly to track implementation and results of the safety plan, with an additional subcommittee specifically coordinating implementation of the bicycle/pedestrian plan. If a program or project has not been started or is underachieving, the group discusses why and what changes need to occur to make the effort successful, a process that keeps stakeholders engaged.²

1 www.scpdc.org/wp-content/uploads/SCRTSP-FINAL-PLAN-2012-04-18.pdf

2 www.scpdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013-HTMPO-AMPO-Awards-Nomination.pdf

Empowering local organizations to speak for affected communities. In the **Twin Cities region of Minnesota**, the **Met Council** is demonstrating how to make the benefits of transit-oriented development accessible to all and effective community engagement is their most crucial tool. In 2010, as the region was developing its Central Corridor light rail line, the Met Council received grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Living Cities to create a partnership focused on ensuring that transit investments connected people of all incomes and backgrounds to jobs, housing choices, recreation and services. The resulting program, dubbed Corridors of Opportunity,¹ works to reach traditionally under-represented populations such as low-income people, people with disabilities, people of color and new immigrants. The program is led by a team of three area non-profit organizations with diverse community engagement experience – Nexus Community Partners, the Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing and the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability – which manage \$720,000 in grants to local community organizing and engagement campaigns along seven transit corridors.

A Community Engagement Steering Committee (CESC) made up of representatives of 21 community organizations drafted grant criteria and recommended applicants. The Corridors of Opportunity Policy Board reviewed and approved these grant recommendations.² The program also provided technical assistance to the community organizations and worked with local government entities to build their capacity to better engage with communities.³ In 2014 the CESC assisted the Met Council in drafting a new Public Engagement Plan that will cover all Met Council activity areas.



Photo by Twin Cities LISC

See the full case study on the **Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA)** in Omaha, NE, and Council Bluffs, IA, in **Innovation in Action** to learn about their distributed model of engagement in their regional visioning.

➤ Resources

- FHWA resources page: http://planning.dot.gov/focus_publicEngage.asp
- Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, “Organizer Roundtable: Sustainable Communities and the Community Engagement Team.” www.metrostability.org/efiles/CETarticle.pdf
- Race and Social Justice Initiative, “Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide:” www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/RSJI/GRE/IOPEguide01-11-12.pdf
- Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO), Public Involvement Best Practices: www.ampo.org/resources-publications/best-practices/public-involvement/

1 www.metrocouncil.org/About-Us/Facts/PlanningF/FACTS-Corridors-of-Opportunity.aspx

2 www.corridorsofopportunity.org/activities/engagement

3 http://metrostability.org/efiles/CET_story_2b_-_about_us.pdf

INNOVATION IN ACTION - CASE STUDIES (FOCUS AREA 2)

MAKING INVOLVEMENT ENGAGING

Missoula MPO (Missoula, MT)

Envision Missoula, a scenario planning process that took place in 2007–08, is a great example of scenario planning directly feeding into the long-range transportation plan update and a powerful illustration of MPO-led public engagement that was both innovative and effective.

The Missoula MPO, the City of Missoula, Missoula County and other involved agencies laid out a clear overview for the process in the following straightforward terms:¹

1. Missoula is preparing a long-range plan for transportation.
2. The transportation plan will serve a long-term land-use vision.
3. The vision will grow out of the broader community.
4. Scenarios will explore competing ideas for our future.
5. The vision is a map and a set of principles.
6. The transportation plan will be based on the vision, will identify projects out to the year 2035 and will be calculated using anticipated financial resources available for transportation.
7. Future land-use and transportation plans may be based on this vision, depending on progress made toward implementation of the vision.

The Envision Missoula process represented a stark departure from previous planning processes in its comprehensiveness and most significantly, its engagement of the public. Importantly, the process took a neutral approach to the desirability of growth, but simply asserted that the area should be prepared for different growth outcomes. Through visioning workshops using creative mapping techniques, electronic polling and a telephone survey, this process enabled citizens with varying needs and preferences to reach consensus. More than 500 citizens participated in workshops, where small groups were asked to build their vision on maps that incorporated transportation routes and considered various modes, open space, nodes of focused development, commercial and office areas and residential areas in the community.²

The outcome of the workshops was a preferred scenario and a set of transportation and development principles. A subsequent telephone survey confirmed consensus for the preferred scenario by demonstrating it to be representative of the greater community.³ This input in turn provided the foundation for the long-range transportation plan. This process demonstrated a new approach to infrastructure investment that was proactive rather than reactive to perceived growth patterns.

The Envision Missoula Transportation Plan won the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) National Award for Outstanding Achievement in Metropolitan Transportation Planning for its linkage

1 <http://web.archive.org/web/20130424071410/www.co.missoula.mt.us/transportation/lrtpu1.htm>

2 www.mdt.mt.gov/research/toolkit/m1/ccbtools/cvis/ws.shtml

3 www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/case_studies/missoula/

of land-use and transportation planning and its inclusive process.¹

In a recent update to its plan the MPO found that having a lasting community consensus around the preferred scenario and guiding principles from the 2008 process enabled the region to continue along a path toward sustainability. In the meantime, Missoula developed and adopted an Active Transportation Plan based on the bicycle and pedestrian elements of Envision Missoula and made several improvements to transit service that had been identified as priorities. Progress on that aspect has been slow to date because one large, expensive project — the Russell Street reconstruction project — consumed most available funds. The MPO hopes to be able to include more in the coming years. An annual yearbook process tracks regional metrics over time to help both planners and the public measure progress toward Envision Missoula goals.²

The Missoula model points to a few general principles for public involvement in long-range transportation planning, regardless of the level of technology used. For scenario planning, the approach should include multiple opportunities for authentic give and take between planners and the community. The scale of the public engagement effort depends somewhat on the size of the metropolitan area and planning process. In the case of Missoula, multiple rounds of public workshops were supplemented with a telephone survey to further verify findings. Early in the process, Envision Missoula presented the community with new data that clearly showed existing trends in development and their impacts on the environment and other quality of life indicators. This example also shows the importance of describing in advance the scenario planning process, the actual policy decisions (in this case, the long-range transportation plan update, among others) that will result from the process and the potential benefits to the community.

1 www.ampo.org/resources-publications/best-practices/long-range-planning/

2 Phone interview with Roger Millar, former Director of the Missoula City-County Office of Planning and Grants (an office that at the time housed the Missoula MPO); conducted 8/13/14.

Missoula, Montana MPO

Type	Housed within county government
Composition	The board has seven members: the Mayor and city councilmember of the City of Missoula, two of the three county commissioners in the MPO, a district administrator of the Montana DOT, a member of the Mountain Line board and a member of the city/county planning board.
Voting	Each voting member gets one vote.
MPOs within MSA	1 MPO within MSA
Annual budget and staffing size	\$860,000; 4 full-time staff
Responsibilities beyond transportation	Land use, land conservation, air quality
Independent revenue authority	Does not collect revenues

References: <http://ci.missoula.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/23415>
www.mposurvey.com/Staffing_and_Administrative_Capacity_of_MPOs.pdf
www.cutr.usf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2010-05-Staffing_and_Administrative_Capacity_of_MPOs.pdf

REACHING OUT PHYSICALLY AND VIRTUALLY

Indian Nations Council of Governments – INCOG (Tulsa, OK)

The Indian Nations Council of Governments (INCOG), which serves the Tulsa, Oklahoma, metropolitan area, has demonstrated multiple innovative techniques for outreach and engagement, without turning to complicated, high-cost technology. Just in the past three years, INCOG has carried out a truly mobile approach to outreach for citizen involvement in a transit master plan and used other techniques in the development of a new regional bicycle and pedestrian master plan.

When INCOG needed to gather citizen input to identify priority corridors for long-term transit development, the agency took an ordinary, 40-foot bus and transformed it into a mobile transit lab. The bus, which traveled to 117 stops in 12 different jurisdictions over a four-month period in 2011, featured video screens, interactive displays and other educational tools. It went to community events, schools, libraries and shopping malls, welcoming more than 2,000 visitors, 88 percent of whom reported that they had never participated in a transportation planning event.¹ Many had little sense for what a high-quality transit system looked like.



INCOG engaged the community where they were located with its mobile transit lab. Source: INCOG

¹ http://fastforwardplan.org/Portals/0/Documents/102011RTSP/Handout_10-13-2011.pdf

Upon entering the bus, citizens could discuss transit possibilities face-to-face with planners, watch a five-minute video and take a short survey, allowing them to air specific transit hopes and frustrations.¹

INCOG kicked off the tour with an event drawing 400 attendees and held a stakeholder retreat with interactive team discussions.² When regulatory and liability hurdles thwarted the attempt to use a standard transit bus INCOG leased a “party bus” for a 12-week period, at a cost of about \$30,000. INCOG staff installed the indoor features themselves over a handful of weekends. “Staffing the events required some weekend time as well, but we were willing to put in those hours to really reach out to the public in a new and effective way,” said James Wagner, INCOG’s Principal Transportation Planner.³

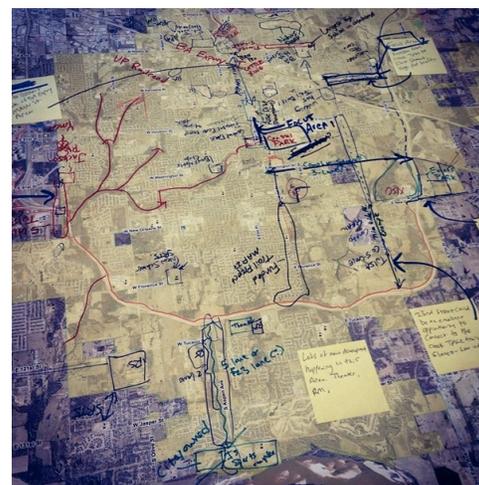


Tulsa's Mayor Bartlett was part of INCOG's outreach effort.
Source: INCOG

The resulting Regional Transit System Plan identifies both near-term and long-term bus improvement strategies. It outlines a 30-year public transportation plan that covers 16 corridors where transit investment would be most beneficial based on land-use patterns, demographics and future population and employment projections.⁴ The plan supplements INCOG’s Regional Transportation Plan 2032 (adopted earlier in 2011) as a financially unconstrained vision for what could be done with more funding and will inform the next update of the regional transportation plan. In the interim, one of the identified transit priorities – the Peoria/Riverside Corridor bus service – was funded through a City of Tulsa sales tax initiative.⁵

Another way that INCOG is looking to supplement the region’s constrained long-range transportation plan is through its current year-long process to prepare a Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan, called the “GO Plan.” In Spring 2014, through a series of “WalkShops,” citizens interacted with planners by walking the communities and giving feedback on what improvements are most needed.⁶

The hub of the related outreach effort is the Tulsa Transportation Resource Center (TRC), a website managed by INCOG that provides information and assistance to residents on transit, bicycling, walking and ridesharing.⁷ This site already has a significant constituency of people interested in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure so it is a natural fit for reaching those communities. In addition, the GO Plan has a presence



<http://instagram.com/tulsagoplan>

1 <https://www.planning.org/awards/2012/>

2 http://fastforwardplan.org/Portals/0/Documents/102011RTSP/Exec_Summ_FINAL_10-13-2011.pdf

3 Wagner phone interview, conducted 8/12/2014

4 <http://fastforwardplan.org/TransitSystemPlan.aspx>

5 Wagner phone interview, conducted 8/12/2014

6 <http://tulsatrc.org/go-plan-walkshops/>

7 <http://tulsatrc.org/goplan/>

on social media including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.¹ Wagner reports that the Instagram feature has especially taken off, as participants have posted photos of infrastructure features and other bicycle/pedestrian-related elements that they like or dislike. INCOG held another regional stakeholder retreat in October 2014 and hopes to adopt the new plan in Spring 2015, at which point the region's localities will be encouraged to adopt plan elements as part of their own comprehensive plans.²

Through these efforts, INCOG never once purchased advertising in the region's media or other coverage. But the initiatives have been creative and popular enough to earn media attention, which is then maximized by the ability of interested parties to share the news over social media. INCOG has thus succeeded in creating a "virtuous cycle" of positive attention and public engagement around planning efforts that are also having a real impact on transportation outcomes.

Indian National Council of Governments (INCOG)	
Type	Voluntary association of local and tribal governments
Composition	INCOG is governed by a Board of Directors and a General Assembly. The Board of Directors is composed of 4 officers and 55 members. It sets policy for the conduct of day-to-day activities of the council. Membership on the Board is based on population size of member governments and includes both elected officials and appointed citizens. The Board of Directors meets on a monthly basis. The General Assembly, composed of one elected official from each member government, reviews and adopts plans, programs and budgets recommended by the Board of Directors. The General Assembly meets on an annual basis.
Voting	Each voting member gets one vote.
MPOs within MSA	1 MPO within MSA
Annual budget and staffing size	\$1.7 million; 14 full-time equivalent staff
Responsibilities beyond transportation	Land use, community and economic development, environmental quality, aging services, GIS and mapping
Independent revenue authority	None
References: www.incog.org/ ; www.incog.org/About_Us/structure.html ; www.incog.org/Transportation/Documents/FY2013UPWP.pdf	

1 <http://tulsatrc.org/go-plan-social-media/>

2 Wagner phone interview, conducted 8/12/14.

SUPPORT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ORGANIZING

Metropolitan Area Planning Agency — MAPA (Omaha, NE and Council Bluffs, IA)

Distributing roles and responsibilities for involvement of stakeholders and the general public has many advantages. It can save an agency resources, as well as facilitate the input of all interested parties through a representative model of participation. In the Omaha–Council Bluffs metro area, the Heartland 2050 visioning process coordinated by MAPA is making effective use of this representative approach through a structure of multiple committees, each one of which is charged with making sure that all voices are heard.¹ The Heartland 2050 process is supported by local foundations and a federal Sustainable Communities grant to help fund the involvement of a diverse group of citizens and stakeholders in the development of scenarios for future growth. The committees provide insight into specific areas of interest and serve as links between the organizations they represent and Heartland 2050 throughout the duration of the project.²

¹ www.mapacog.org/heartland-2050

² <http://heartland2050.org/what-is-heartland-2050/teams/>

One committee is the Equity and Engagement Committee, which is broadly responsible for public outreach activities, with a particular focus on ensuring that voices of traditionally under-represented groups are heard throughout the process.

The Equity & Engagement Committee has an open membership process. Throughout the project, many organizations suggest and invite other community groups and non-profits to attend and contribute to ensure equity is at the forefront of the visioning process. Through Heartland 2050's outreach efforts, relationships have been forged with members of a variety of marginalized groups including the refugee community. Omaha has the largest population of Sudanese refugees in the United States.

One such example is a scenario-planning workshop that was well-attended at the Yates Community Center in Omaha, a facility that provides a variety of social services to the refugee community. During the workshop participants created nine maps depicting how the Heartland region should grow through the lens of the refugee experience. This workshop had more than 60 participants speaking 11 different languages. These maps continue to be used at Yates Community Center to help refugees learn how to navigate through the region. Three stakeholder committees (represented by the green, blue and red sections in the diagram above) are designed to serve as forums for discussion and inform the creation of scenarios and ultimately the preferred vision for growth, to focus on:

- **People (Human Capital)** develops proposals related to the region's human resources and the systems that support human growth and development.
- **Places (Built Capital)** focuses on the region's built environment and assets.
- **Resources (Natural Capital)** focuses on the region's natural resources and systems.



Source: <http://heartland2050.org/what-is-heartland-2050/teams>

As the plan developed, the original stakeholder committees were combined into a single Vision Committee focused on six topic areas: Resources, Infrastructure (transportation, utilities, etc.), Housing and Development, Economic Development, Education and Health and Safety. The committee developed recommendations on outcomes, strategies and actions that were then reviewed by the Steering Committee (represented by the yellow section in the diagram on the previous page), made up of 40 public- and private-sector leaders. The Steering Committee spent a year in a data-driven process learning about the issues affecting the metro area. Throughout the committee was updated on the public input process from Equity and Engagement Committee members.

Tying together these committees is what MAPA calls its “golden rule” for public outreach in the Heartland 2050 effort: “[P]eople who make up the region have to be able to see themselves in the Heartland 2050 plan, to see how their lives will be prosperous as implementation of this plan begins to happen.”¹

MAPA also included two polls in the outreach effort. The firm Heart and Mind Strategies sought to get a handle on residents’ shared values around the future of the region, reinforcing and adding nuance to the results of the public outreach efforts. A second set of polling will be conducted near the end of Heartland 2050 to confirm that the recommendations enjoy public support.

MAPA estimates that they have heard from more than 3,000 citizens in a 12-month period spanning 2013–2014.² Representatives of various interest groups serving on the stakeholder committees have made many more collective voices heard as part of the process. The key to making all of this a lasting innovation in MPO public engagement, however, will be to ensure that “the committees evolve into a platform for continued discussion and collaboration beyond the term of the project.”³ Such sustained involvement by stakeholders would represent a significant step beyond the typical MPO citizen advisory committee.

1 <http://heartland2050.org/info-center/>

2 *Ibid.*

3 <http://heartland2050.org/what-is-heartland-2050/teams/>

Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA)

Type	Voluntary association of local and tribal governments
Composition	MAPA is governed by a 64-member council of officials, representing each of the 63 governmental units that comprise MAPA, that set policy and structure Agency programs. The nine-member Board of Directors sees that the policy is carried out. The Board of Directors members represent nine specific Council of Officials member entities, seven members from the largest cities and counties and two members representing small communities and counties in Nebraska and Iowa. The Board of Directors receives recommendations from the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee.
Voting	One member each has one vote.
MPOs within MSA	1 MPO within MSA
Annual budget and staffing size	\$4.6 million; 18 full-time staff
Responsibilities beyond transportation	Community and economic development, waste management, ozone and air quality, emergency management
Independent revenue authority	None

References: www.mapacog.org/boards-a-committees
www.mapacog.org/images/stories/Trans_General/FY2015%20Budget.pdf
www.mapacog.org/images/stories/Trans_General/UPWP_FY15_Am01_2014_06_27.pdf
www.mapacog.org/staff