



Evaluation of Public Involvement Activities

Baltimore Regional Transportation Board

September 28, 2021



Background of Overall Project

Task 1: Evaluate effectiveness of current BRTB public involvement activities/key documents

Task 2: Review BRTB public involvement activities with key participants

Task 3: Tools, trainings, and recommendations to improve the public involvement and decision-making process

New Community Engagement Platform

- This spring publicinput.com was launched to increase our ability to engage people with a range of resources across the digital divide.
- The partnership now allows the public to participate in public meetings via phone, share comments via voicemail, and to share comments or complete surveys via text messaging.
- Meetings via PublicInput real-time transcription and captioning of speakers to increase access for people with disabilities.
- Publicinput is also being used to conduct surveys and engagement for various activities, utilizing PublicInput's interactive website features to educate and engage a range of stakeholders.

Key Concerns of the PAC

Assessment: Core Issues Identified

- Lack of clarity regarding purpose and relevance of the PAC given that many decisions are made at state or county level
- Many members do not feel they have meaningful influence
- Lead time to consider and comment on issues pending before the BRTB is often limited
- Membership does not fully represent the region's population
- Difficulty attending meetings due to time and/or location
- Difficulty retaining members, particularly from outlying jurisdictions
- Limited orientation for new members

Comparison with Other MPOs

- Internet scan of peer MPOs that are a) roughly similar in size and b) known for strong public involvement programs
- Reveals a mix of practices, with some peer MPOs using citizen committees and others relying on alternative methods to engage the public
 - MPOs with citizen committees include Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, and Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization
 - MPOs without citizen committees that excel in public involvement include Puget Sound Regional Council and North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

Comparison with Other MPOs, cont.

- **Conducted a survey in partnership with AMPO**
 - Distributed to the AMPO Public Involvement Working Group
- **Questions covered committee membership, roles, meeting frequency and use of virtual meetings, perceived usefulness, and engagement with issues of equity, among others**
- **Responses show a mix of practices in place**
 - Example: meeting frequency varies—some meet monthly, some bi-monthly, some quarterly, and others “as needed” with no set schedule
 - Those without committees gave varied reasons for not having one

Suggested Options

Option A: Retool the PAC

- Reduce the frequency of meetings to 6-8 meetings
- Consider a later meeting time to accommodate those who must travel from work
- Convert some meetings to a virtual format
- Provide a simple meal for in-person meetings

Suggested Options cont.

Option B: Replace the PAC with New Forms of Engagement

- Add seats for the general public to other BRTB advisory committees to preserve opportunities for regular, structured input
- Create a virtual panel to provide input to BMC/BRTB for various activities throughout the year
- Involvement of former PAC members in the Every Voice Counts Transportation Academy
- Consider holding an annual public workshop prior to the development of the UPWP

What is Under Way

- After reviewing all of the feedback from PAC members and the consultant recommendations, BMC staff received approval from the Executive Committee to continue with WSP/PRR to explore the option of building a virtual panel in order to engage a wider audience from around the region.
- Until that has a chance to show its merits, the PAC remains a dormant committee. If the larger, virtual panel works well, that may be the main vehicle for input moving forward. If it does not work out, the BRTB should consider another type of public engagement or a revised format for the PAC.

Considering a Virtual Panel

- Would serve as a permanent focus group, providing input for various activities and topics throughout the year
- Aim for approximately 50-75 members
- The panel would mainly function “asynchronously” through email outreach and online feedback
- Current and past members of the PAC would be invited to join
- Additional members recruited with help from the BRTB and from BMC’s email lists, social media followers, and organizations representing a wide range of constituencies

Proposed Forms of Panel Interaction

- **Surveys**
- **Preference polls or trade-off exercises**
- **Forums or threaded chats that allow members to interact with each other on a given topic**
- **Requests to review and comment on draft materials**
- **Requests for volunteers to help design a particular public involvement activity**
- **Scheduled virtual meetings that could include updates or special topic presentations from staff and Board members, followed by breakout groups**
- **An annual in-person summit in conjunction with Every Voice Counts**

Pursuing the Details of a Virtual Panel

- Objectives
- Composition
- Proposed Forms of Interaction
- Platform Options
- Reporting and Feedback

For More Information

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