PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to identify the plan for equitably engaging the public and stakeholders as part of the Transit Development Plan Update (TDP) process. The engagement plan provides an overview of target audiences and stakeholders, anticipated messages, engagement and communication techniques, and timing relative to TDP milestones. The project decision-making structure, as well as staff roles and responsibilities, are also defined.

Goals

The goal of the public engagement efforts for the TDP update is to build and strengthen relationships in the community while gathering stakeholder and public input, responding to comments and concerns, and keeping decision-makers and other stakeholders informed throughout the TDP update process.

Principles of Equitable Community Engagement

Equitable public engagement is centered in:

- Providing community members an opportunity to influence decisions, especially by underrepresented populations
- Welcoming diverse representation from our community and successfully gathering input representative of the community, including from easily ignored underrepresented populations
- Creating an environment that encourages informed participation
- Effective meeting design and facilitation

Equitable community engagement is characterized by more than technical competence; it is based in kindness, integrity, and listening with an intent to understand both comments as well as the values underlying the comments. These principles establish the framework with which the planning team will lead public engagement for the TDP update.

In addition to these principles, the planning team will be following and incorporating Grand Forks – East Grand Forks MPO's Public Participation Plan, which includes standards for equitably engaging Title VI, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Private Sector, and Environmental Justice (EJ) populations.

Stakeholders

One of the initial and ongoing tasks will be to identify stakeholders and confirm that these organizations and individuals are represented in the study process. We anticipate engaging with the stakeholders listed below.

- **Residents and visitors, including**
  - People of color
  - People with low incomes
  - People with varying physical and cognitive abilities
  - People who work or attend school in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, including shift workers
  - People who rely on transit
  - People who currently use transit
  - People whose first language is something other than English
  - Seniors

  - Youth

- **Businesses/Institutions**
  - Alerus Center
  - Altru Health System
  - Amazon
  - American Crystal Sugar
  - Columbia Mall
  - Community High School and Adult Learning Center
  - East Grand Forks Campbell Library
  - East Grand Forks City Hall
  - East Grand Forks Civic Center
  - East Grand Forks Public Schools (including Parent Teacher Associations)
  - Grand Cities Mall
  - Grand Forks City Hall
  - Grand Forks International Airport
  - Grand Forks Public Library
  - Grand Forks Public Schools (including Parent Teacher Associations)
  - Grand Forks YMCA Family Center
  - Hugo's
  - J.R. Simplot
  - LM Wind Power
  - Northland Community and Technical College
  - Property owners and managers
  - Ralph Engelstad Arena
  - Riverview Clinic
  - Target
  - University of North Dakota
  - Valley Senior Living
  - Walmart
- **Community Organizations**
  - Anne Carlson Center
  - Community Violence Intervention
  - East Grand Forks Food Shelf
  - East Grand Forks Senior Center
  - Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch Thrift Store
  - Development Homes, Inc.
  - Douglas Place
  - Goodwill
  - Grand Forks Downtown Development Association
  - Grand Forks Growth and Support Center
  - Grand Forks Housing Authority
  - Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation
  - Grand Forks Senior Center
  - Grand Forks and East Grand Forks Chamber of Commerce
  - Greater Grand Forks Convention and Visitor's Bureau

  - Job Service North Dakota
  - Listen Drop-in Center
  - Lutheran Social Services
  - North Country Food Bank
  - North Dakota Association for the Disabled
  - Northland Rescue Mission
  - Northwest Minnesota Multi-county Housing Authority
  - Options Center for Ind. Living
  - Polk County Developmental Achievement Center Inc.
  - Polk County Social Services
  - Prairie Harvest Mental Health
  - Red River Valley Community Action
  - Salvation Army – Grand Forks
  - St. Anne's Living Center
  - Success Unlimited
  - The Arc Upper Valley
  - Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.
  - United Way of Grand Forks/East Grand Forks
  - Village Family Services

- **Partner Agencies**
  - City of Grand Forks
  - City of East Grand Forks
  - Cities Area Transit (CAT)
  - Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
  - Grand Forks / East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization
  - Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)
  - North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT)

Engagement Schedule

The following schedule outlines the key time periods during which the public and stakeholders will be engaged in the project as well as what will take place before and after the engagement.

Engagement and Communications Techniques

Throughout the TDP update process, the public and stakeholders will have multiple opportunities to learn about the plan and provide meaningful input online and in person. The specific techniques to be used fall into three primary categories:

- Stakeholder communications
- Surveys
- Meetings

Timing and details of the various activities are provided in Table 1.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS

The TDP process will use the following methods to facilitate and maintain communications.

Website

A project website will be live throughout the duration of the project. This website will be a standalone website with a link on the MPO and Cities Area Transit websites. Website content will be ADA accessible and available in multiple languages. The website will be a central place for people to find information about the project, surveys, or any other project materials.

Accessible Materials

Accessible materials will be prepared that are easily understood by a wide range of project stakeholders. These materials will use nontechnical, easy-to-understand language to present project information and custom graphics and figures. This will include distribution of a project brochure or handout. Two updates to the initial brochure/handout are planned: before the second round of engagement and at the end of the project for use by MPO staff and project partners. The final brochure will summarize final study results and maintain a consistent message.

We also will develop a project poster, which includes project contact information and a link/QR code to the project website. This poster will be hung at transit facilities and distributed to community organizations and housing complexes.

Notifications and Online Media

For both rounds of public meetings, we will prepare and provide a general media release for distribution to local media outlets. An email notification will be provided to the entire project contact list. Social media packages will be provided to the MPO and each stakeholder group to be posted to each entities' website and social media accounts. Social media ads will be utilized to advertise the public survey and interactive map.

SURVEYS

Surveys are essential for gathering information from various stakeholders at the beginning of the project as well as for gathering feedback on project recommendations. Surveys will be available online and in a paper format and distributed to current transit riders, non-riders, transit operators, and decision-makers.

Public Survey

Surveys will be administered to both current riders of the system and non-riders. To achieve increased participation, these surveys will focus on a few key questions rather than an extensive list of questions. While the exact questions for the surveys will be discussed with MPO staff, they will focus on what is currently working well and any issues with the current system as well as barriers to using the system, changes that could be made to make the transit system work for their travel needs, and demographic information.

Posters will be posted strategically to direct people to take the surveys online, and paper surveys with prepaid postage will also be distributed to locations connected to people who may be less likely to take an online survey. We have found this strategy to be particularly effective with older adults during COVID-19.

A special effort will be made to reach people who are traditionally underrepresented in planning processes. Rather than trying to create new networks of relationships for this project, existing networks will be leveraged to reach people. Surveys and project materials will be distributed to community members through local organizations.

Operator Surveys

Transit operators know the system better than anyone due to their interaction with customers and experience driving the existing routes. We will collect surveys from operators to gain their insight on existing issues. These surveys will be available at the garage for operators to complete either before or after their shift and give the operators an opportunity to voice issues with the system. After collecting and processing the surveys, project staff will share the results with the operators and let them know how their feedback will be incorporated into the final plan.

Decision Maker Survey

A survey will also be distributed to decision makers representing the service area, including elected and appointed government officials, MPO staff, and partner agencies. The survey will collect information about issues with the existing transit and public transportation system as well as priorities for the system. Constituents often contact decision-makers when systems are not working well, so they are great resources for this information. Decision-makers also influence the distribution of resources and make choices that affect the system, so it is important to understand their perspective of the system at the beginning of the study.

Interactive Map

The Kimley-Horn team will develop an interactive map that will be used for both gathering information at the beginning of the project as well as sharing the proposed recommendations for enhanced services and gathering public feedback on the recommendations.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be used to share project information and discuss specific topics with the general public and stakeholder groups.

Steering Committee

The TDP update will be guided by a Steering Committee, which will provide oversight and input into the development of the plan and a new Transit Advisory Committee. The Kimley-Horn team will develop an effective framework for working with this committee that can continue beyond the planning process. Four meetings will take place at strategic times throughout the planning process. At the beginning of the project, we will gather information and feedback on operations and engagement and engage in a goalsetting exercise; at midpoints, we will share data analysis, public and stakeholder feedback, and draft recommendations; and finally, we will meet toward the end of the project to discuss the final plan and implementation strategies. The Kimley-Horn team will schedule and lead the meetings, prepare the materials, and provide meeting summaries and follow-up. All materials will be shared with the Steering Committee at least one week in advance, and the Kimley-Horn team will record meeting minutes that will be submitted to the MPO within one week of the meeting.

Focus Group Meetings

Up to four focus groups will be held throughout the project and will seek to hear from businesses, non-profit organizations, and those living, working, and studying in Grand Forks / East Grand Forks (particularly those already riding the CAT system). Focus groups have been especially useful because these representatives are able to share more detailed insight.

- **Audience:**
  - Paratransit riders
  - Fixed-route riders
  - Community/social service organizations
  - Businesses/employers
- **Purpose:**
  - Provide a project overview and generate interest in the project
  - Gather information on user experiences (issues and what is working well)
  - Explain how feedback will be incorporated into the final plan
- **Timing:** Four focus groups during Phase 1 separated by audience

Public Meetings and Virtual Presentations

Public meetings will be opportunities for people to learn about the project and provide input regarding the transit system. There will be two public meetings during each phase of engagement in transit accessible locations such as the Midtown Transit Center / Grand Cities Mall, Metro Transit Center, East Grand Forks Library, University of North Dakota, Northland Community & Technical College, or Red River State Recreation Area. To supplement the public meetings, the Kimley-Horn team will create a virtual presentation for people to click through on the project website on their own time to learn about the project and provide feedback.

Engagement Evaluations

Kimley-Horn will track and analyze the input received and the effectiveness of our communication and engagement efforts. As we host meetings and collect surveys, specifically the Title VI survey data we collect through the engagement process, we will track who we are hearing from and who we are not hearing from. This will allow us to adjust our methods and communication as necessary to reach a better representation of people within the community. Adjustments may include connecting with additional community and cultural leaders or utilizing targeted social media advertisements.

Specific techniques will be evaluated periodically by the project team to help shape future activities. Evaluation of techniques will be based on the following criteria:

Quantitative

- How many people attended events? How many people completed the activities or comment forms?
- How many people opened email messages or viewed web posts?
- How many likes, shares, retweets, or comments on social media postings?

Qualitative

- What kind of feedback was received on the community meetings?
- What kind of feedback was received on the social media and website posts and email messages?

- Have stakeholders expressed any challenges regarding their participation?
- Did input received affect decision-making? How?

Quantitative and qualitative evaluation measures will be summarized in meeting summaries, which will also include updated information on website and social media activity.

A summary of the public engagement process, input received, analysis of that input and how it was used will be included as part of the final Transit Development Plan document.

Table 1: Engagement Techniques and Associated Information

Technique	Target Audience	Purpose/ Intended Message	Tools	Frequency/ Timing	Roles/ Responsibility
Project Website	> All stakeholders > General public	> Purpose of project > Project schedule and progress > Summarize results > Provide opportunity for feedback	> Plain language > Custom graphics	> Initial draft before first round of community meetings > 1st update prior to second round of community meetings > 2nd update at end of project	> Consultant Team: develop content > MPO: review content
Email Updates	> Stakeholders	> Project information and updates > Notice of upcoming meetings	> Email	> Periodically	> Consultant Team: email template, content development > MPO: content review
Comment Database	> Project team > Stakeholders	> Track comments and responses > Be transparent	> Sortable Excel spreadsheet > Document coding	> Ongoing	> Consultant Team: compile and code database > MPO: review for information

Technique	Target Audience	Purpose/ Intended Message	Tools	Frequency/ Timing	Roles/ Responsibility
Project Brochures	> All stakeholders > General public	> Purpose of project > Project schedule and progress > Summarize results	> Plain language > Custom graphics	> Initial draft before first round of community meetings > 1st update prior to second round of community meetings > 2nd update at end of project	> Consultant Team: develop content > MPO: review content
Project Poster	> All stakeholders > General public	> Provide contact information and link to project website	> Custom graphics > QR code	> Beginning of project	> Consultant Team: design and print > MPO: review
Notifications/ Online Media	> All stakeholders > General public	> Provide notice of upcoming community meetings	> Media releases > Email notifications > Social media posts	> Prior to 1st and 2nd rounds of public meetings	> Consultant Team: develop content, send email notification > MPO: review content, distribute media release, post to social media accounts

Technique	Target Audience	Purpose/ Intended Message	Tools	Frequency/ Timing	Roles/ Responsibility
Public Survey	> All stakeholders > General public	> Gather information on user experiences (issues and what is working well) > Gather information on barriers to use and suggested changes	> Paper surveys on buses > Electronic surveys on project website > Distribute through existing networks	> Beginning of project	> Consultant Team: develop and distribute survey > MPO: review content
Operator Survey	> RPT operators	> Gather information on user experiences (issues and what is working well)	> Paper survey available in the break room	> Beginning of project	> Consultant Team: develop and distribute survey > MPO: review content
Decision Maker Survey	> City councils	> Gather information on issues with the system and priorities	> Electronic survey distributed via email	> Beginning of project	> Consultant Team: develop and distribute survey > MPO: review content
Steering Committee Meetings	> A diverse group of stakeholders	> Provide oversight and input into the development of the plan and a new Transit Advisory Committee	> Small group discussion	> Up to four meetings – one at the start of the project, two at midpoints, one at the end to discuss final plan	> Consultant Team: prepare and lead meetings, record meeting minutes > > MPO: attend meetings

Technique	Target Audience	Purpose/ Intended Message	Tools	Frequency/ Timing	Roles/ Responsibility
Focus Groups	> Dial-A-Ride riders > Businesses/employers > Community/social service organizations > People who rely on transit	> Gather information on user experiences (issues and what is working well)	> Small group discussion	> Up to four meetings > Beginning of project	> Consultant Team: recruit participants, prepare and lead meetings > MPO: attend meetings
Public Meetings + Virtual Presentations	> All stakeholders > General public	> 1st meeting: provide project background, gather input on what works well and areas of improvement > 2nd meeting: present and gather feedback on draft recommendations and Title VI analysis	> Display boards > Project handouts	> Four meetings – two at the start of project and two at the end	> Consultant Team: develop content, design materials, create meeting notice, staff meetings, create meeting summaries > MPO: review materials, staff meetings