

2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This chapter describes stakeholder engagement and outreach strategies implemented in support of the Augusta Regional Transportation Study 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (ARTS MTP or 2050 MTP). Public participation is a critical component of the continuing, cooperative and comprehensive Metropolitan Transportation Planning process as well as community ownership of the 2050 MTP. This is the public's plan, so outputs of the final 2050 MTP process reflect robust engagement with as many population groups as possible. In particular, public outreach efforts ensure that traditionally under-represented population groups are included in the planning process.

Although public involvement is a mandatory component of the MTP update process, the ARTS MPO strived to go beyond what is required to seek true engagement with the community about the region's transportation future. Multi-pronged strategies gave constituents ample opportunity to contribute as well as options for *how* to provide input. Members of the ARTS community participated through digital media or through pen-and-paper feedback forms, and materials were provided in multiple languages. The ARTS MPO utilized more traditional public meeting formats, but it also engaged with the public at cultural and arts festivals, at meetings for special interest or community groups, through TV segments, radio podcasts and social media, and via email outreach.

The MTP Update reached out to stakeholders and the public throughout the course of the planning process (as shown in Figure 1-3). The MTP Update remained visible and accessible to the public through the project webpage, community-based outreach, and updates on social media. At key milestones in the MTP update process, including at the initiation of data collection and the development of goals, objectives, and measures of effectiveness, the public were consulted for input into the decision-making process.

This chapter contains three major sections: **Section 2.1** presents the plans and goals for the public involvement process. **Section 2.2** discusses the process and results of the first round of public outreach, and **Section 2.3** discusses the process and results from stakeholder engagement, the second round of public outreach, and the third public involvement presentation. More detailed discussion including outreach materials used in promoting engagement activities and during actual public meetings and other engagement events is included in **Technical Report #1**.

2.1 Public Involvement Process

Planned public outreach activities followed the recommendations in the ARTS Public Participation Plan Update, adopted December 2017. The ARTS Public Participation Plan includes five components, which formed the basis for the MTP outreach efforts.

Public engagement took place throughout the MTP process, and concentrated public coordination occurred during two education and outreach phases, presented in detail in **Technical Report #1**. The first phase took place during existing conditions data collection and encompassed an initial set of public meetings and outreach opportunities.

The purpose of these preliminary engagement efforts was to outline the MTP process for the public and gain insight into the public's thoughts on transportation options and desired goals for the draft MTP.

The second phase of public involvement took place alongside project prioritization. The purpose of this later outreach effort was to maintain robust engagement with stakeholders and partners, gather more detailed information about potential projects, and seek feedback on proposed recommendations.

The primary goals of the public involvement for this project are:

- To inform and involve the public throughout the MTP update process.
- To consult with local officials and staff to gather their ideas for transportation solutions.
- To consult with community stakeholders and gather their ideas for issue identification and the creation of solutions.

In delivering a robust public involvement process, several strategies were employed to generate interest and active participation, including:

- Branding strategy with project logo and slogan "Future Mobility 2050"
- A series of public workshop meetings held in convenient locations throughout the ARTS area
- MetroQuest Surveys, interactive, visual and online
- Project website with the domain name FutureMobility2050.com
- Social media including Facebook and Twitter

Please see **Technical Report #1 - Appendix 1. Public Engagement Materials** for specific descriptions and samples of each of these participation strategies.

2.2 First Round of Public Engagement

The first round of public engagement was a general outreach effort to make the community aware of, excited for, and thinking about the current and upcoming transportation planning process. The primary objective of the first round of engagement was to educate people about the MTP document and why it is important to the region's transportation future. A series of public meetings took place throughout the ARTS region, and there were additional opportunities to learn and get involved digitally.

Public engagement opportunities were extensively advertised in local print and visual media sources. The project also has a Facebook page with general information and links to specific event pages for each public engagement opportunity. Partner counties and cities linked to these events on their own social media pages. A print flyer appeared on the project website and in local newspapers, and the same flyer appeared as a public announcement on the Augusta-Richmond Municipal Building internal TV network.

2.2.1 Public Meetings

The first round of public engagement workshops took place from Tuesday, October 8 to Thursday, October 10, 2019. The Team held two concurrent meetings from 5:30 pm to 8:00 pm on both October 8 and October 10 including two in Richmond County, one in Columbia County, and one in Aiken County. The four public meetings had comparable

set ups and agendas. Each venue had a sign-in table at the entrance of the room, seating and a screen for a brief presentation, and several stations around the room with interactive display boards. Each location had telephone jacks to allow call-in participation and were along public transit routes to the extent possible.



Figure 2-1. Photos from the First Round of Public Meetings

Participants indicated their visions for the ARTS planning area’s transportation future using sticky notes. The most common visions were for more and improved greenways, transit routes, bike lanes, and sidewalks. People also noted the importance of reducing vehicle congestion and conflict with at-grade trains. Meeting attendees submitted written comments about what they would like to see in the region. These comments were similar to those that appeared on the visioning board: people wrote about the importance of bicycle infrastructure and greenway implementation. Additional topics included a need to consider jobs and development when thinking about transportation needs.

2.2.2 Festivals

As a kick-off event for the first round of public involvement, the Team set up a booth at the Arts in the Heart of Augusta Festival on September 20-22, 2019 (see **Figure 2-2**). Arts in the Heart is an annual event that celebrates creativity and culture. With food vendors from over 20 countries, a juried arts and crafts market, and ongoing performances on four stages, the Festival regularly draws thousands of visitors. Over the course of the two-and-a-half-day event, over 500 festival attendees visited the ARTS MPO booth to learn about the MTP planning process. Visitors filled out digital and paper versions of the MetroQuest survey, and to date this event remains the single biggest driver of survey responses: over 360 people completed the survey.



Figure 2-2. Outreach at the Arts in the Heart of Augusta Festival

2.2.3 Speaker's Bureaus

The Team attended various special interest meetings and local events in Fall 2019 to conduct initial outreach and educate the community about the MTP process and its importance:

- Senior Explosion – September 25
- Age Friendly Augusta – October 10
- Latin Family Fiesta – October 12
- GDOT Intersection Control Evaluation Workshop – October 22
- Breckenridge Homeowners Association – October 23
- Richmond County Neighborhood Association Alliance – November 2
- Aiken Rotary – November 4

2.2.4 MetroQuest Survey

During the first round of public engagement meetings, festivals and events, residents had the opportunity to talk to the project team and share their feedback through a paper and online survey. The project team used MetroQuest, an online survey tool to administer the survey (see **Figure 2-3**). The survey was available in English, Spanish, and Korean. A paper survey was developed to be used at events that the project team hosted and attended. The paper surveys were also available in English, Spanish, and Korean. The survey was open from September 20th through November 1st, 2019, and a total of 1,010 surveys were collected during the six-week comment period.

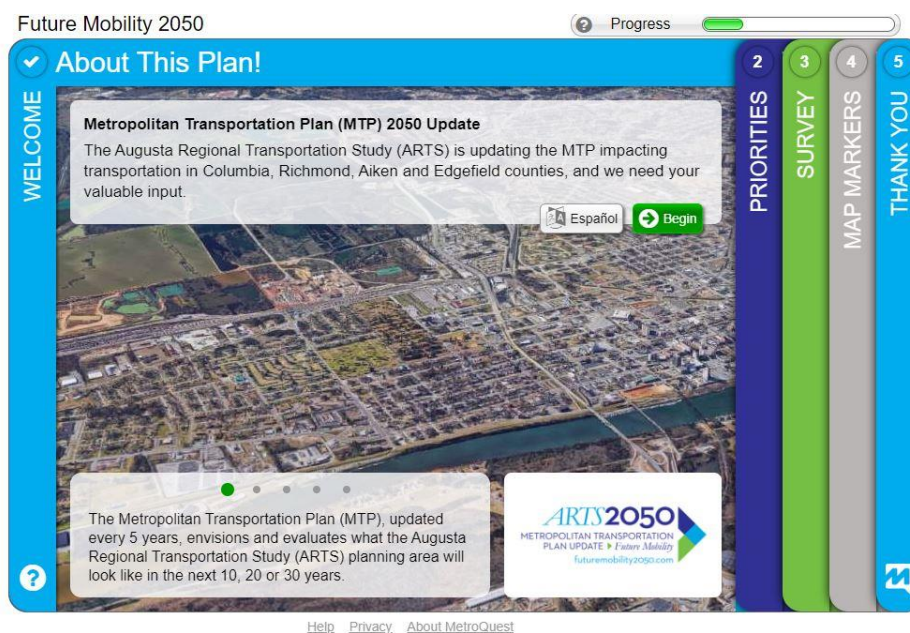


Figure 2-3. MetroQuest Survey Welcome Page

2.2.5 Social Media Outreach

To increase awareness of the upcoming public meetings, the Team purchased advertising space on Facebook from October 1 to October 11. The advertisements were programmed to show up in someone's Facebook feed if they were within a certain geography of where each public meeting would be taking place.

2.3 Second Round of Public Engagement

A second round of public engagement sought more focused input on project types and locations. This process took place after initial data collection and inventory of existing conditions. Engagement tools included the following:

- A stakeholder meeting was conducted on February 12, 2020 to gather valuable local inputs from the stakeholders in the ARTS planning area.
- The second round of **public meetings** was conducted in a workshop setting to allow attendees the opportunity to interact with, identify, and discuss project-related issues with staff and other participants. Engaging, easy-to-understand materials and exercises were developed and available at the public meetings to provide attendees with knowledge about the MTP Update and encourage active participation in the process.
- The Team continued to use **social media channels** such as Facebook and the project website to advertise meetings, post materials, promote the project survey, and increase awareness about the MTP process.

2.3.1 Stakeholder Involvement

The stakeholder outreach process included key policy and decision-making groups operating within the ARTS area. These include, but are not limited to: city, county, and regional governing bodies; roadway, transit, rail, and aviation agencies; local transportation advocacy groups; community and neighborhood associations; tourism boards, chambers of commerce, and developers; and boards of education and local universities.

The ARTS MPO has identified a preliminary group of stakeholders based on previous 2040 LRTP outreach efforts and ongoing collaboration within local communities. Additional groups were included based on input from partner counties and cities within the ARTS planning area including local media outlets, active community and advocacy groups, and municipal departments interested in the region's transportation future. Further, members of this committee served as champions for the MTP Update process, informing their constituents about the effort and opportunities to get involved. They also provided the Team with useful information on effective ways to engage the public. The momentum generated by this committee can also be critical for the future implementation of the plan.

A stakeholder outreach meeting took place on February 12, 2020 at the beginning of the second public involvement period. This meeting, which was publicly advertised and had a call-in option, provided the study team with insight into stakeholder transportation needs, environmental and cultural concerns, and other issues relevant to the study. After a brief staff presentation on the latest status of the MTP update, stakeholders were asked to provide feedback at three interactive stations including funding allocation, goals ranking, and a draft Universe of Projects.

Stakeholder feedback indicated a desire for less funding for widening projects and more funding for operational, median, and corridor improvements as well as bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Highest ranking priorities were given to mobility, accessibility, and connectivity as well as economic vitality. These outputs dictated the priorities that were discussed with the broader public, and ultimately directed the evaluation framework that was applied during the plan's development.

2.3.2 Public Meetings

During the second round of public engagement, seven workshops took place during 4pm – 7pm from Monday, March 9 to Thursday, March 12, 2020. On March 10, 11 and 12, two meetings were held simultaneously. Overall, there were two meetings in Richmond County, two meetings in Columbia County, two meetings in Aiken County and one meeting in Edgefield County.

Once attendees signed in and were settled, the meetings began with a brief presentation on the MTP planning process, progress to date, and the timeline moving forward. The remainder of the meeting allowed attendees to interact with proposed project lists and provide feedback. This feedback shaped the universe of recommendations included in the final MTP document.



Figure 2-4. Photos from the Second Round of Public Meetings

2.3.3 Media Outreach

Prior to the second round of public meetings, ARTS staff and the project Team advertised public involvement opportunities through a variety of media strategies including United States Postal Service’s Every Door Direct Mail®, Local News Channel 6, a local podcast Makin’ A Difference in a segment called “Transportation Talks.” These measures functioned as an advertisement for upcoming public meetings and also promoted the second MetroQuest Survey, discussed in **Section 2.3.4** of this report.

2.3.4 MetroQuest Survey

During the second round of public engagement, the project team used a second MetroQuest survey to gather additional input (see **Figure 2-5**). The Team developed a new MetroQuest survey with project-specific questions. The interactive survey allowed participants to make decisions about funding and project prioritization.

The survey was open from Monday, March 9th through Monday, March 30th, 2020, and a total of 200 surveys were collected during the three-week comment period. All survey responses were collected via the online survey. A paper survey was developed to be used at events and roadshows that the project team hosted, attended and planned to host/attend. The paper surveys were also available in English, Spanish, and Korean.

Throughout the month of March 2020, the Team planned to go into the community with paper and digital versions of the MetroQuest survey along with the funding allocation and priority ranking activities from the second round of public meetings. ARTS staff were going to engage members of the public at area libraries and transit stations, local events, and community group meetings. Unfortunately, COVID-19 (The 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease) made it unsafe and impractical to convene in large groups, and the supplemental outreach efforts, initially planned throughout the ARTS planning area and in an effort to engage traditionally underrepresented populations, were cancelled. Despite the project Team’s efforts to promote the survey via the project website and social media, the Team acknowledges that in-person engagement likely would have solicited more responses and a more diverse set of respondents.



Figure 2-5. Second MetroQuest Survey Welcome Page

The first survey screen asked participants to rank the eight transportation goals from the 2040 LRTP. The highest percentage of respondents chose “Safety and Security” as their highest priority. An analysis of average rankings of the seven priority options shows that respondents rated “Safety and Security” and “Reduce Traffic Congestion” as number one and number two priorities, respectively.

The second survey screen asked participants to distribute funds to the different project categories. Each participant was directed to drag coins to invest in Widening/Capacity, Safety/Operations, Bridges/Maintenance, Public Transit, and Bicycle/Pedestrian. Each user had a total of 100 ARTS dollars to distribute based on personal preference. The MetroQuest respondents generally wanted far less investment in road widenings and new capacity and more investment in all other project categories.

The third survey screen featured an interactive map where participants could add markers in locations that needed improvements within the study area. Participants could add comments to each marker if they have specific concern or need. Participants chose from six types of improvement markers: widening, safety, maintenance, public transit, bike/pedestrian, and other. Over the course of the survey response period, respondents placed 679 markers on the map. Locations needing bike and/or pedestrian improvements received the highest number of responses (153).

For a complete report of the MetroQuest survey responses, see **Technical Report #1 - Appendix 3. Second MetroQuest Survey Results: Full Report.**

2.3.5 Social Media Outreach

The Team continued to use social media channels such as Facebook and the project website to advertise meetings, post materials, promote the project survey, and increase awareness about the MTP process. The Team purchased advertising space on Facebook from Monday, March 2 to Thursday, March 12 of 2020. The advertisements were programmed to show up in someone’s Facebook feed if they were within a certain geography of where each public meeting would be taking place.

Chapter 2 Key Points

- Public participation is a critical component of the continuing, cooperative and comprehensive MTP process as well as community ownership of the 2050 MTP. The MTP Update reached out to stakeholders and the public throughout the course of the planning process and remained visible and accessible to the public through the project webpage, community-based outreach, and updates on social media.
- The first round of engagement, conducted between late September and early November of 2019, included outreach at the 2019 Arts in the Heart of Augusta Festival, a series of public meetings, outreach at various special interest meetings and local events, the MetroQuest Online Survey (Phase 1), paper survey, and social media outreach to educate people about the MTP document and why it is important to the region's transportation future.
- A stakeholder meeting, held on February 12, 2020, provided the study team with insight into stakeholder transportation needs, environmental and cultural concerns, and other issues relevant to the study.
- The second round of public meetings was conducted in March 2020 as a workshop setting to allow attendees the opportunity to interact with, identify, and discuss project-related issues with staff and other participants. This round of outreach also included a variety of media strategies through USPS mail, local TV news, and a podcast interview; the MetroQuest Online Survey (Phase 2); and social media outreach.
- A one month (30 days) public review period of draft MTP document in July/August 2020 was implemented to listen to and reflect public feedback before the adoption of the final MTP.