

Chapter 7

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The quality and effectiveness of transportation decision-making often depends on how well the different needs and perspectives of the residents are understood and addressed. Public involvement consequently plays a crucial role in the preparation of any transportation plan. Guided by the Public Participation Plan (PPP), H-GAC implemented a broad-based public outreach program in the development of the 2045 RTP.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

H-GAC's Public Participation Plan defines the MPO's responsibilities, goals, and strategies for engaging the public in transportation planning activities. The plan prescribes an open process that encourages regional stakeholders and the general public to provide comments and other relevant input before key planning decisions are made.

H-GAC's public participation plan was updated in 2017 to meet several new requirements specified in the FAST Act.¹ In compliance with the federal regulations, several new stakeholders were added to the list of interested parties that must be included in the transportation planning process. The new target groups include representatives of public ports, freight shippers, private providers of transportation services, employer-based commuting programs, convention and visitors' bureaus, and tourism information services. These stakeholder groups were engaged in the planning decision-making through the public meeting and comment process. The updated public participation plan can be viewed at: https://www.h-gac.com/transportation-public-outreach/documents/2017_Public_Participation_Plan_FINAL9.25.17.pdf.

The public participation plan provides specific guidelines for the 2045 RTP consultation process:

- Provide adequate and timely notice about outreach events and opportunities for the public to review and comment on key decisions;
- Provide the public, stakeholders, and policy makers with reasonable access to information about pertinent transportation issues;
- Employ effective visual techniques to aid the public's understanding of technical transportation issues;
- Make meeting notices and project information available in electronically accessible formats;
- Hold public meetings at accessible locations and during hours convenient for the target communities;

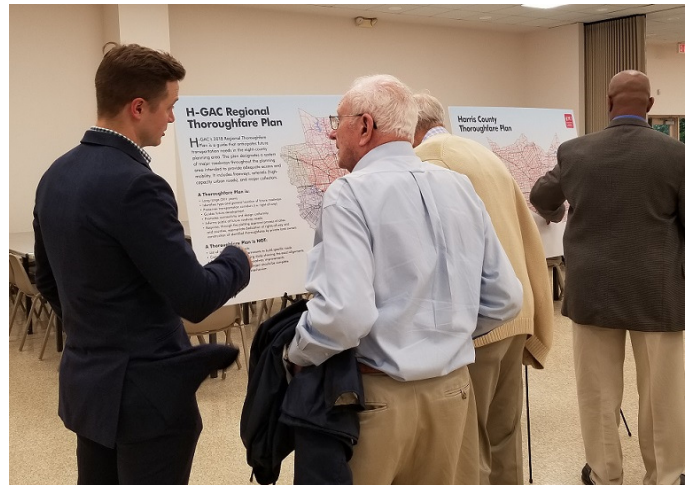
¹ Ref: 23 CFR 450.316(a).

- Provide a variety of opportunities to comment on the RTP, including in person as well as electronic means;
- Demonstrate explicit responsiveness to public input received during the outreach process;
- Proactively seek out and consider the needs of the traditionally underserved population and make reasonable accommodations for persons with limited English language communication skills; and
- Periodically review the effectiveness of the plan in creating opportunities for meaningful involvement for all communities.

PUBLIC OUTREACH STRATEGIES

H-GAC hosted more than 20 public meetings and open house events for the 2045 RTP and the 2018 “Call for Projects.” At least one meeting was held in each of the eight counties that make up the metropolitan planning area.

Overall, more than 400 individuals and stakeholder representatives attended the public meetings, several of whom participated virtually, through a dedicated livestream. Staff utilized graphic boards and PowerPoint slides to illustrate their presentations. An opportunity was provided for meeting participants to ask questions, and meeting participants were invited to leave comments. A list of the public meetings with their venues and scheduled times is presented in Table 7-1.



The MPO maintains several databases of individuals and stakeholder groups who receive notices about scheduled public meetings and other opportunities to provide comments on transportation planning issues. In developing the 2045 RTP, H-GAC collaborated with elected and appointed officials, business and chambers of commerce institutions, representatives of public transportation, non-profit agencies, community organizations, public agencies, public ports, the freight industry, private transportation providers, commuter programs, active transportation, environmental justice, LEP advocates, tourist organizations, media representatives, and other interested parties.

As innovations in communication technology revolutionize the ways people obtain news and share information, the MPO has adapted its public involvement procedures to include modern communication preferences. The 2045 RTP meeting invitations and informative fact sheets were published by email blasts, digital and social media advertising, social media postings, U.S. postal service, direct mail marketing, utility bill inserts, digital newsletters, video, dynamic message signs, newspapers, radio and television announcements, and through the agency website.

Date	Location	County Represented	Number of Attendees
March 15, 2018	Dawson High School	Brazoria	43
March 21., 2018	Prairie View A&M University*	Waller	16
March 22., 2018	Alief Community Center*	Harris	14
March 28., 2018	Sugarland City Hall	Fort Bend	30
March 29., 2018	Kashmere Gardens Multi-Service Center*	Harris	17
April 4. 2018	Oscar Johnson Jr. Community Center	Montgomery	19
April 5. 2018	Leon Z. Grayson Community Center*	Harris	8
April 11, 2018	Cleveland High School	Liberty	15
April 12, 2018	Eagle Pointe Recreation Center – Magnolia Room	Chambers	8
April 19, 2018	Houston METRO	Harris	20
April 24, 2018	Helen Hall Library	Galveston	25
April 26, 2018	Houston-Galveston Area Council	Harris	22
May 1, 2018	Baytown Community center	Harris	10
January 24, 2019	Friendswood City Hall	Galveston/Harris/Brazoria	32
January 29, 2019	Liberty City Hall	Liberty/Chambers	39
February 5, 2019	Kingdom City Houston	Harris/Fort Bend/Waller	15
February 7, 2019	Tomball City Hall	Harris/Waller/Montgomery	27
February 12, 2019	Houston-Galveston Area Council	Region/(Livestream)	31/(75)

Table 7-1: Schedule of Public Meetings for the 2045 RTP Update

* Indicates location is in an underserved community

BIKEHOUSTON

Calendar Resources Blog About Engage

Your Comments Are Needed

By 2045, the Houston Galveston region will be home to nearly 11 million people.

How will we manage traffic congestion and improve safety?

2045RTP
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

[Click Here To Add Your Comments](#)

*The 2045 RTP for the Houston-Galveston area is a guiding document that sets multimodal transportation investment priorities for the region to improve safety, mobility, state of good repair, economic competitiveness and quality of life.

H-GAC has created an [FAQ](#) page to help you understand what H-GAC and the 2045 RTP is:

What Is The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC)?

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice policy requires the MPO to verify that low-income and minority communities are not disproportionately impacted by government activities. The MPO is also enjoined to ensure that these traditionally underserved communities receive transportation investments just like other communities in the region, and that they are offered opportunities for “full and fair” participation in the transportation decision-making process.²

A variety of strategies were used to encourage participation by the traditionally underserved population. An environmental justice community outreach database was created to facilitate targeted messaging to community advocates, non-profit organizations, elected officials, faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, housing advocates, community development organizations, special interest groups, private transportation providers, and individuals with demonstrated interest in the environmental justice

FAST ACT COMPLIANCE

H-GAC’s public participation plan was updated in 2017 to add new stakeholder groups to the list of interested parties for public engagement. These include representatives of public ports, freight interests, private providers of transportation services, employer-based commuting programs, convention and visitors’ bureaus, and tourist information services.

communities. Because community partnerships have been found to be a particularly successful strategy for boosting participation in the minority and immigrant communities, H-GAC partnered with local elected officials and community leaders to circulate information about public meetings and opportunities for citizen involvement.

Several of the 2045 RTP Update public meeting events were scheduled for venues within communities identified as

sensitive for environmental justice, to facilitate participation by area residents (See Table 7-1). Lastly, MPO outreach staff attended the organized neighborhood association and civic group meetings in the underserved communities and gave presentations on the 2045 RTP as part of the meeting agenda.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

The H-GAC Public Participation Plan institutes a language assistance program for persons with limited proficiency in the English language or who are unable to communicate effectively due to disability. American sign language interpreters as well as Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Hindi translators were available for certain public meetings, to ensure that language isolation was not a barrier to effective participation by the public.

H-GAC’s language assistance strategy also includes translating vital documents and outreach materials in the non-English languages with the largest population of native speakers. Legal notices and public service announcements about the 2045 RTP were placed in the different native languages in the local community newspapers and on the community radio and television stations. Comments cards were also produced in English and in Spanish – the two languages most prominently spoken in the region.

² FHWA Environmental Justice Order 6640.23A.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

More than 1,200 comments were received verbally or provided on comment cards distributed at the 2045 RTP public meetings and open house events. Comments were also received electronically via email, by telephone, via the 2045 RTP website, and by U.S. postal service. The feedback on the transportation challenges and priorities help to identify community needs and define preferences for the transportation plan. The top ten citizen priority areas derived from the 2045 RTP comments are shown in Figure 7-1. A collection of the public comments received for the 2045 RTP and the Call for projects is available in Appendix O.

TOP TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

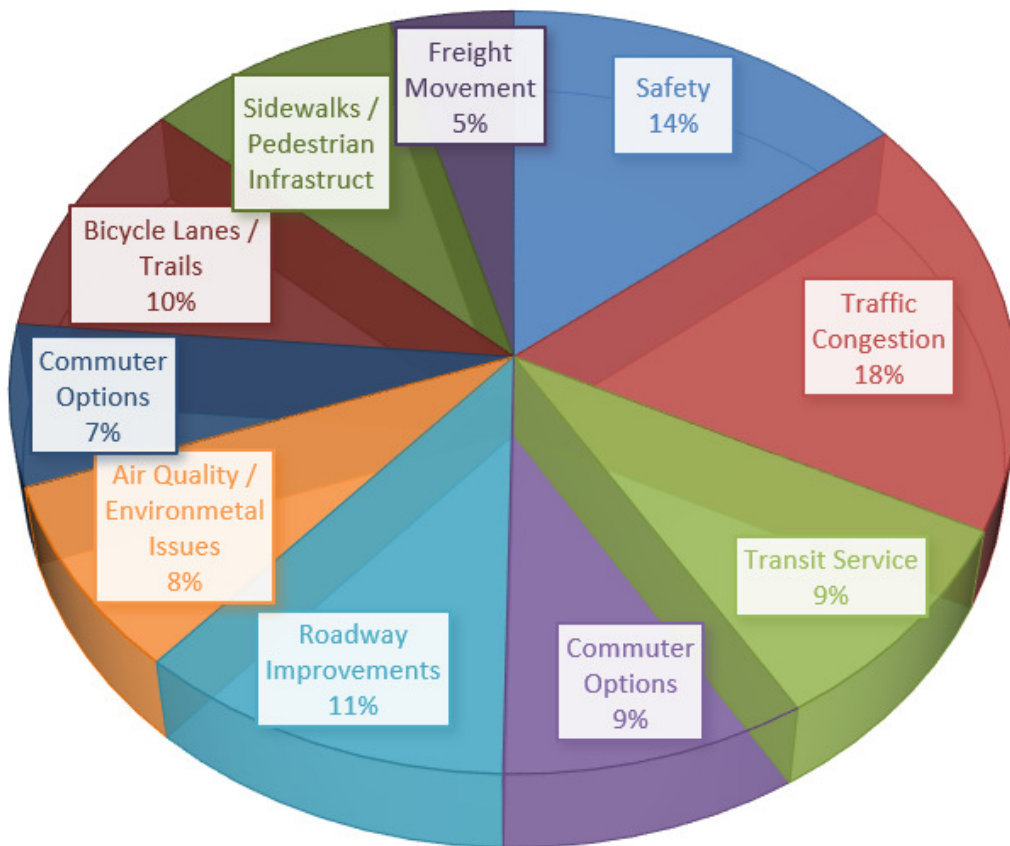


Figure 7-1: Top Ten Transportation Priorities Areas