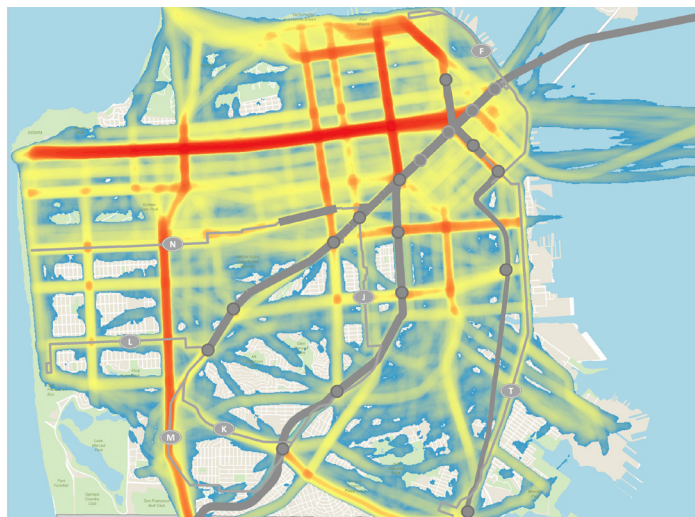


Virtual public involvement supports agencies' efforts to engage the public more effectively by supplementing face-to-face information sharing with technology.

Innovative virtual public involvement techniques provide State departments of transportation (DOTs), transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and rural transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) with a platform to inform the public and receive feedback. These strategies create efficiencies in how information is disseminated and how input is collected and considered, which can potentially accelerate planning and project development processes.

ENCOURAGING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public involvement is a critical component in the transportation decision-making process, allowing for meaningful consideration and input from interested individuals. As daily users of the transportation system, the public has useful opinions, insights, and observations to share with their State DOT, MPOs, and local agencies on the performance and needs of the transportation system or on specific projects. Timely and strong public engagement has the potential to accelerate project delivery by helping identify and address public concerns early in the planning process, thereby reducing delays from previously unknown interests late in the project delivery process.



A heat map illustrates responses from citizens when they were asked where future subways should be built.
Source: San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority



Virtual public involvement tools include online surveys, visualization, and telephone town halls.

Nearly all State DOTs and most MPOs and local agencies use websites to post information about their activities. With the increased use of social media tools and mobile applications, the public can access user-friendly features such as online videos, podcasts, crowdsourced maps, and other interactive forums to receive information and provide input.

These new opportunities for information sharing and public involvement in the transportation planning, programming, and project development process include, but are not limited to, telephone town halls, online meetings, pop-up outreach, social meetings/meeting-in-a box kits, story maps, quick videos, crowdsourcing, survey tools, real-time polling tools, social media following, visualization, and working with bloggers.

BENEFITS

- ▶ **Efficiency and Low Cost.** Virtual tools and platforms can efficiently be made accessible to communities, many at a lower cost than traditional public engagement methods.
- ▶ **Accelerated Project Delivery.** Robust public engagement helps identify issues early in the project planning process, which reduces the need to revisit decisions.

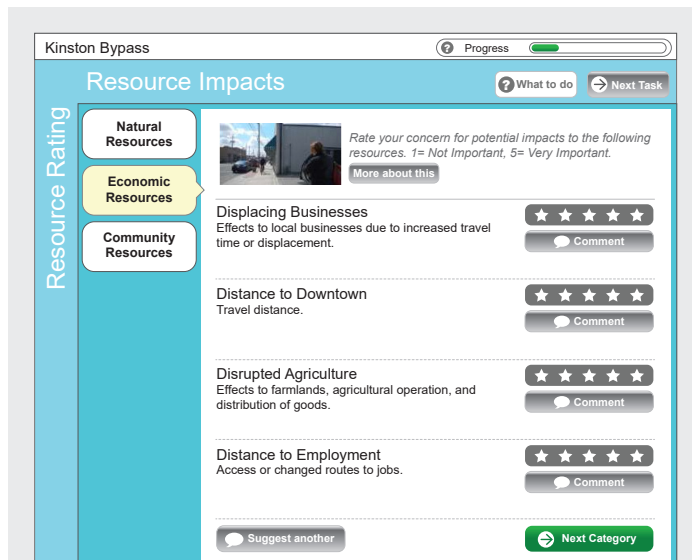


- ▶ **Communication and Collaboration.** Virtual public involvement can aid in establishing a common vision for transportation and ensure the opinions and needs of the public are understood and considered during transportation planning and project development.
- ▶ **Expanded Engagement.** Virtual tools include stakeholders who do not participate in traditional approaches to public involvement. Greater engagement can improve project quality.

STATE OF THE PRACTICE

Virtual public involvement provides State DOTs, MPOs, and local agencies throughout the country with a platform of innovative tools and strategies for making public involvement more accessible, thus providing a better understanding of the public's concerns regarding transportation system performance and needs. The following are examples of successful virtual public involvement techniques:

- ▶ Colorado DOT held telephone town halls to conduct large-scale outreach while developing a long-range statewide transportation plan, including one town hall for each MPO and RTPO region in the State.
- ▶ Minnesota DOT targeted limited English proficiency (LEP) populations while updating the Statewide Multi-modal Transportation Plan by using tablet-based surveys in multiple languages. The tablet-based surveys allowed Minnesota DOT staff to visit LEP communities and solicit stakeholders to easily point, click, and respond.
- ▶ The City of Richmond, VA, used targeted stakeholder meetings, a "wikimap," and innovative data collection via a cloud-based data-gathering tool to gather field observations and specific information from people with first-hand experience biking and walking along Richmond's streets.



The North Carolina DOT used public involvement software to guide the development of its 2018-2027 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

- ▶ Delaware DOT created a mobile app that assembles project information, provides real-time traffic alerts, notifies users of project-related upcoming public meetings, and provides a way for stakeholders to contact DeIDOT when issues arise.
- ▶ North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority is using real-time polling as part of live meetings and webinars.
- ▶ Texas' Alamo Area MPO is using low-cost videos in posts on social media.
- ▶ Florida DOT holds virtual public hearings for median alterations. These online meetings have improved participation, reduced costs, and elicited useful project feedback.

RESOURCES

FHWA EDC-5 Virtual Public Involvement
https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/edc_5/virtual_public_involvement.cfm



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