

DRAFT

4

CHAPTER

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

CHAPTER 4 - PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The development of Connect 2045 required a unique and nimble approach to public involvement that utilized a wide range of strategies and outreach methods. This approach is outlined in the Connect 2045 Public Involvement Plan (PIP) approved by the TPO Board on September 25, 2019 and included in **Appendix #**. The PIP is consistent with the objectives and measurements from the River to Sea TPO Public Participation Plan. The PIP also includes specific measures to track the effectiveness of public outreach efforts. The result of these measures is included in **Appendix #**. This chapter provides an overview of Connect 2045 public outreach.

The TPO offered a variety of public involvement opportunities throughout the development of the plan for members of the community, local and agency representatives, and other stakeholders to provide perspective, input, and feedback. A significant part of outreach to the community included a number of presentations to local organizations, including Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs, which reached more than 400 people. See **Table 4-1** for a timeline of public involvement activities.

Notable themes reflected in the public input received included uncertainty about the impacts of emerging technologies, the need for additional funding, the importance of resiliency, bicycle/pedestrian safety, the relationship between transportation and land use, and the need to provide the community with a variety of transportation options.

The input received through the TPO's public outreach efforts helped guide the development of Connect 2045 and validate the list of projects that were ultimately recommended in the Plan.

COVID-19 AND IMPACTS TO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In March 2020, the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) in the United States preceded directives from federal, state, and local agencies to limit non-essential social gatherings and interaction. In light of the social distancing guidance and executive orders noted below, the TPO evaluated the impact to public input processes for the development of Connect 2045.

- On March 16, 2020, President Trump issued "15 Days to Slow the Spread" guidance advising individuals to socially distance and avoid groups larger than 10 people until March 31.
- On March 29, the timeframe for this guidance was extended to April 30 and formally updated on March 31, in coordination with the White House Coronavirus Task Force, as "30 Days to Slow the Spread".
- Florida Governor DeSantis issued a "Safer At Home" order (Executive Order 20-91) effective from April 3 through April 30.

Similar executive orders and directives continued beyond these dates through adoption of the plan. Recognizing the need to change course in the approach to public involvement, the TPO proactively shifted to virtual/technology-based approaches as alternatives to the in-person activities identified in the approved Connect 2045 PIP. Specifically, alternative approaches were applied to the Cost Feasible Plan Public Workshops, Environmental Justice Workshop, and other Stakeholder Outreach activities which otherwise would include face-to-face presentations given to, and interactions with, the public and many partner organizations.

Planned activities such as the River to Sea TPO Annual Planning Retreat had to be cancelled. The TPO defined the appropriate virtual approaches for public input activities while social distancing directives were in place and revised the PIP accordingly which was formally approved by the TPO Board at its meeting on May 27, 2020.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IN-PERSON PUBLIC INPUT AND PLAN REFINEMENT AFTER ADOPTION

The alternative public involvement activities provided robust input, but follow-up outreach efforts will be pursued to ensure that the public has an opportunity to be fully engaged and informed about Connect 2045. The TPO will prioritize making accommodations at the appropriate time after plan adoption in September to “go out” to the public for face-to-face engagement, as originally intended, to provide for additional meaningful input. As part of this process, the TPO will ensure that underserved and underrepresented populations are afforded substantive opportunity to comment on the plan. These public comments will be considered for potential amendments to the adopted plan as appropriate.

Table 4-1: Public Involvement Activities

Date	Activity	Location
January 7, 2020	Focus Group Workshop	Deltona
January 9, 2020	Focus Group Workshop	Daytona Beach
January 13, 2020	Focus Group Workshop	New Smyrna Beach
January 15, 2020	Focus Group Workshop	Palm Coast
January 16, 2020	Focus Group Workshop	DeLand
March 2, 2020	Needs Assessment Workshop	Palm Coast
March 4, 2020	Needs Assessment Workshop	Daytona Beach
March 10, 2020	Needs Assessment Workshop	DeLand
May 26, 2020	Cost Feasible Plan Virtual Workshops	Hosted virtually via GoToWebinar
July 21, 2020	Public Workshop	Hosted virtually via GoToWebinar
August 4, 2020	Environmental Justice Workshop	Hosted virtually via GoToWebinar
Daytona Beach/Virtual	Governing Board Meetings	Multiple Venues
Daytona Beach/Virtual	TPO Standing Committees and LRTP Subcommittee Meetings	Multiple Venues
Daytona Beach/Virtual	Public Comment	Multiple Venues

CONNECT 2045 WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The website for Connect 2045 was launched at the beginning of the planning process to provide a consistent and frequently-updated resource for information about the development of the LRTP.

The main sections of the website include:

- **Home** – Includes dates and locations for upcoming events/meetings, important links, and videos.
- **About** – Provides background information about the TPO and answers to frequently asked questions.
- **Resources** – Includes Connect 2045 documents, LRTP Subcommittee agendas, and links to previous TPO plans and studies.
- **Contact** – Includes a contact form to provide comments and TPO phone/email contact information.



The TPO also utilized Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/RivertoSeaTPO>), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/tellthetpo>), YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/volusiatpoFL>), and Nextdoor (<https://nextdoor.com/pages/river-to-sea-tpo/>) to share timely and relevant content related to the development of Connect 2045. In addition, many of the TPO's partner local governments posted information to their respective websites.

VIDEOS

Another innovative method utilized to engage the public was the development of three videos that were released during specific phases of the planning process. The first video was released at the onset of the process to provide an overview of Connect 2045 and a call to action for the public to provide their input. The second video focused on the potential impacts and opportunities created by emerging transportation technologies. The third video was released to inform the public of adjustments being made to outreach activities because of the limitations in place due to COVID-19. The content and focus of the third video was shifted in response to the unfolding pandemic and was the result of the proactive efforts to deal with changing circumstances during the development of the plan.



These three videos were posted to the Connect 2045 website, the [TPO's website](#) and the [TPO's YouTube channel](#).

CONNECT 2045 SURVEY

An LRTP-specific survey was released in January 2020 to gain insight into the public's thoughts related to emerging technologies, resiliency, and funding for transportation projects. This survey was offered in English and Spanish and was available online and promoted via the TPO's social media channels. Hardcopy versions were also made available for distribution at appropriate venues. The survey had more than 500 responses. Highlights included:

- Over 70% of respondents believe that electric vehicles and assisted/smart/automated vehicles will be used *more or much more* over the next 10 to 20 years.
- Respondents felt that the two most valuable approaches to increasing the long-term resiliency of our transportation system is to *upgrade existing facilities in the most vulnerable areas and expand emergency response efforts so facilities are restored as quickly as possible after events*.
- When given a range of options of transportation project types to prioritize for funding, the highest ranked response was technology projects (*e.g. improving traffic signals for greater efficiency, electronic messaging signs that provide real time information to motorists, and improved electronic monitoring systems that help to better manage traffic*).

The survey results were a helpful tool in gauging the public's opinions about key themes being addressed throughout the planning process. The complete Connect 2045 survey results are included in **Appendix #**. In addition to the Connect 2045 survey, the TPO also obtained public feedback on a variety of transportation topics through the more broad-based "Tell the TPO" Survey.

FOCUS GROUP WORKSHOPS

Five (5) Focus Group Workshops were held between January 7 and January 16, 2020 throughout the TPO's planning area. Community stakeholders were invited by the TPO to participate in these workshops to provide meaningful input and local perspectives related to the transportation challenges and opportunities facing the region, and to provide guidance in the development of the LRTP.

The format for these workshops was based around the three major themes of the plan – Technology, Resiliency, and Funding Choices. Workshop participants were given a booklet which provided baseline information on each of the three topics, including current trends, and a number of questions intended to act as a catalyst for discussion.

Each segment of the workshop began with the facilitator briefly reviewing a number of the current trends and statistics related to each respective topic, followed by presenting the questions provided within the booklet to begin the dialogue.



Over the course of the five workshops, recurring themes and key points included:

- The impacts and benefits of technology on transportation remain uncertain.
- Monitor the horizon to be prepared for the many changes that are coming.
- More funding is needed, but balance investments across project types for funding we do have.
- Keep working to expand transportation options.
- Focus on safety, health, and equity.
- Recognize the relationship between transportation and land use decisions.
- Resiliency is important and we need to make wise investment choices.
- Know the context – there are distinct economic and demographic differences within the region and needs may differ depending upon the location.

See **Appendix #** for a more detailed summary of Focus Group Workshop input.



PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

A series of public workshops were scheduled to inform citizens of the plan and to solicit comments on the transportation projects identified for the future.

Needs Assessment Workshops

Three (3) Needs Assessment Workshops were held between March 2 and March 10, 2020 in Daytona Beach, Palm Coast, and DeLand. Stations throughout the meeting space included maps depicting projects identified as needs in order to receive input from the public. TPO and consultant staff provided information to the attendees on the planning process and solicited their comments and feedback. The comments provided by workshop attendees included both concerns and support regarding particular roadway projects, and expressions of support for connected bike lane networks, trails, scenic byways, and expanded bus routes.

Cost Feasible Plan Workshops

The Cost Feasible Plan workshops were originally scheduled to take place in April 2020. Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, these workshops were conducted virtually utilizing the GoToWebinar platform in the morning and evening of May 26, 2020. Participants at the workshops were given the opportunity to comment on projects that might be included in the draft Cost Feasible Plan prior to its presentation to the TPO Board and Advisory Committees. Recordings of the Cost Feasible Plan Workshops were posted to both the TPO website and the Connect 2045 website. Comments and questions submitted by the public encompassed many topics, including a number who were concerned with operational and safety improvements, bicycle facilities/trails, and transit service.

On-Demand Public Workshop

On Tuesday, July 21, 2020 a virtual public workshop was held to solicit public input on the final phase of the development of the Connect 2045 transportation plan. This workshop provided the public an overview of the the planning process and also provided an opportunity to comment on projects that might be included in the draft Cost Feasible Plan. A recording of the webinar was made available for on-demand viewing between July 22 – July 31, 2020. Comments and questions from the public addressed the connection between identified projects and future land uses, environmental/sustainability concerns, access to transit, and processes involved in developing the LRTP.

See **Appendix #** for a more detailed summary of public input from each of the Public Workshops.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE WORKSHOP

Per U.S. Executive Order (E.O. 12898, 59 FR 7629), efforts must be made throughout the development of plans and projects to avoid disproportionate adverse effects on minority and low-income populations. This attention to protecting all communities is known as Environmental Justice (EJ), and the 2045 LRTP development included efforts to evaluate sociocultural effects and EJ.

An Environmental Justice Workshop was conducted virtually on August 4, 2020. The workshop shared information about the establishment and importance of environmental justice and provided opportunity for the discussion of potential impacts of transportation improvements on elderly, minority, disabled, and low-income populations throughout the River to Sea TPO planning area. This type of input is important to help guide and prioritize needs and future projects in the LRTP, with the goal of minimizing negative impacts to those areas identified as having a higher proportion of populations included in environmental justice considerations. A recording of the Environmental Justice Workshop was posted on the TPO website.

ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION CONSULTATION

In order to understand the environmental mitigation opportunities and issues within the metropolitan planning area, the TPO conducted direct outreach to appropriate federal, state and local land management, resource, and environmental agencies including:

- US Fish and Wildlife Service (US Department of the Interior) including the Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
- National Park Service (US Department of the Interior) including Canaveral National Seashore
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- St. Johns River Water Management District
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Florida Forest Service (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services)
- Volusia County
- Flagler County

While consultation with Tribal governments is also prescribed, there are no designated Tribal lands within the boundaries of the TPO planning area. In addition to the above outreach, analysis of applicable agency-provided data sources and conservation plans was conducted to broaden the scope of consultation. More detail regarding this process is provided under the Environmental Mitigation section of Chapter 7 and in **Appendix #**.

FREIGHT COORDINATION

The River to Sea TPO is focused on supporting an effective freight network for the advancement of trade and economic vitality in the area. This includes supporting existing activities and future freight-dependent commercial interests. As part of the planning process and to identify the potential freight transportation needs, the TPO engaged the freight community including extended coordination with FDOT as a key agency planning for regional and statewide freight transportation. Additional outreach also included economic development and chamber organizations that represent private freight industry interests. For additional information regarding freight coordination, please see the Freight Mobility and Trade Plan section in Chapter 2 (page #-#) and the comprehensive Connect 2045 Freight Summary in **Appendix #**.

MEDIA AND STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

During the course of the planning process, local media was contacted to promote public participation opportunities. TPO staff also engaged various stakeholder groups with targeted presentations related to the development of Connect 2045. While the approach to these targeted presentations was altered due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions, the TPO continued engagement where practical including virtual presentations by the TPO Executive Director to civic organizations.

The TPO shared and promoted Connect 2045 updates and events through posts to its Facebook and Twitter accounts. Posts were shared and 'retweeted' by members of the public, partner jurisdictions, and community organizations. A number of these agencies and organizations shared Connect 2045 information on their respective websites. Connect 2045 was also covered in the *Daytona Beach News-Journal* and *Volusia Hometown News*.

See **Appendix #** for a more detailed summary of media coverage, social media interactions, and promotion of Connect 2045 events.

TPO BOARD AND COMMITTEE COORDINATION

The development of Connect 2045 included significant review as part of the regular meetings of the River to Sea TPO Board, standing committees, and the LRTP Subcommittee. These groups include citizen representatives, elected officials, local government staff and special interest advocates representing all portions of the TPO's planning area. Advance public notice was provided for each board/committee meeting in accordance with Florida Statutes and the adopted bylaws of the TPO.

In addition to the River to Sea TPO Board, input and guidance on the development of the plan was provided by the following:

- Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)
- Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)
- Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB)
- LRTP Subcommittee

It is important to note that advisory input on the public involvement approach was provided throughout the process by citizen representatives on the BPAC, CAC, and LRTP Subcommittee. This input helped to provide the perspectives of non-transportation professionals regarding when and how long the public comment periods would occur for the various planning products and to ensure the information was being interpreted as intended.

SUMMARY

Connect 2045's public involvement approach underpinned the entire process of plan development. While the challenges from COVID-19 led to mid-course changes that had the potential to negatively impact the public input process, the TPO proactively implemented effective alternative approaches. While the interpersonal dynamic of face-to-face communication was not feasible through virtual methods, online workshops appeared to provide greater ease of access. Online meetings had higher overall attendance than previous in-person meetings. The TPO is using this valuable experience to help tailor and apply the most effective approaches in future planning efforts.