Establishing Mobility Investment Priorities

Under TxDOT Rider 42:

Public Engagement Activities Update

Prepared for
Texas Transportation Commission
And
83rd Texas Legislature

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Mobility Investment Priorities Project
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- Austin District
- Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Capital Metro
- Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority
- City of Austin
- Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce
- Downtown Austin Alliance
- Downtown Transportation Management Association
- Texas Transportation Institute

**Dallas-Fort Worth**
- TxDOT Dallas and Fort Worth Districts
- North Central Texas Council of Governments
- North Texas Tollway Authority
- City of Dallas
- City of Fort Worth
- Dallas Area Rapid Transit
- Fort Worth Transportation Authority
- Denton County Transportation Authority
- City of North Richland Hills
- City of Richardson
- City of Haltom City
- Texas Transportation Institute

**Houston**
- TxDOT Houston District
- Houston-Galveston Area Council
- City of Houston
- Harris County
- Houston METRO
- Houston TranStar
- Harris County Toll Road Authority
- Texas Transportation Institute

**San Antonio**
- TxDOT San Antonio District
- San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Alamo Area Council of Governments
- City of San Antonio
- Alamo Regional Mobility Authority
- Bexar County
- VIA Metropolitan Transit
- Texas Transportation Institute
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognizing the growing urgency of the traffic congestion problem, the 82nd Texas Legislature set aside $300 million to get the state’s highest-priority roadway projects moving, beginning with those segments identified as the 50 most congested roads in the state in 2010. In order to accomplish this task, as a part of the General Appropriations Act (H.B. 1, TxDOT Rider 42), the Legislature directed the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) to provide assistance to the metropolitan planning organizations, the TxDOT District offices and other project partners in their development of projects and programs to address mobility concerns and to report to the Texas Legislature and the Transportation Commission.

The Mobility Investment Priorities project is designed to identify which roadway projects and programs promise the biggest “bang for the buck” in the state’s most congested regions, and to lay the groundwork to help make those projects and programs happen. But for them to happen, it is essential that the public support them and support the manner in which they will be paid for. Thus, a primary task of this effort is to ensure that: individuals and stakeholder groups will have ongoing, direct involvement throughout the two-year study.

The May 2012 Public Engagement Report for the Mobility Investment Priorities project reviewed progress toward public engagement for the regions at that time, presented best practices and case examples, and offered recommendations to help agencies ensure that their public engagement activities are meaningful, credible, productive and successful. A list of eight steps was provided, designed to achieve the goals of Rider 42, including:

1. Initiate a broad public discussion to raise awareness of the state’s mobility crisis and to begin building public consensus toward solutions.
2. Sustain the discussion through means of an assertive public education campaign to help citizens and voters understand the magnitude of the state’s mobility crisis and the consequences of inaction.
3. Communicate with all stakeholder groups content that is based upon polling results and project information produced through the Mobility Investment Priorities project.
4. Continue polling to ensure that changes in public opinion are understood and reflected in ongoing public engagement efforts.
5. Enlist and continually expand community-based networks of movers and doers (both elected and non-elected) to assist in educating various community segments.
6. Ensure that leader/educator networks have ongoing, meaningful interaction with citizens in a manner that accurately reflects the input and opinions of those whose lives are affected daily by worsening traffic congestion.
7. Ensure that public engagement efforts at all levels are funded at a level sufficient to ensure that communication efforts with all audiences are thorough, and that feedback from those audiences is accurate and meaningful.
8. Expand the use of technology in public engagement.

This “Check-in” report revisits the intent, goals and benchmarks outlined in the May 2012 report and examines current efforts by the individual study areas to assess progress to help agencies ensure that their public engagement activities are meaningful, credible, productive and successful. It should also be
noted that the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Texas Transportation Commission have made remarkable strides in reaching the objective of ensuring meaningful public engagement in transportation decision-making. Specifically, the Texas Transportation Commission formally adopted a policy governing TxDOT’s public involvement. In April 2012, the Office of Public Involvement (OPI) was created at the headquarters level. This is a sign of the importance TxDOT administration places on public involvement. The OPI provides focus and guidance on public involvement for the agency, as a whole, as well as providing direct support to the districts. It is apparent that the Texas Transportation Commission and TxDOT realize the value of proactively involving the public in transportation decision-making, and as such, continue to make progress toward achieving these objectives.
ASSESSMENT APPROACH

Introduction
As introduced in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report for the Mobility Investment Priorities (MIP) project, a vital part of developing an outcome-oriented public involvement process is measuring the performance of the public engagement efforts in advancing the development of regionally identified projects. In this case, the overarching mission of the MIP project is to address congestion for the 50 most congested roads in the state in 2010. Specific to public engagement, the mission is: “The public must understand and support any set of projects, programs and plans that are developed from the process.”

Measuring the performance of public engagement requires measuring the relevant inputs, outputs and outcomes. It is critical to understand, however, that the MIP project inputs, outputs and outcomes encompass not only efforts scoped for and paid by the MIP project itself, but also continuous, ongoing efforts by the Texas regions and local agency efforts to address congestion region wide and implement corridor-specific improvements. That is, this evaluation of public engagement performance necessarily acknowledges current efforts while making recommendations for additional improvement to meet the expectations set forth under Rider 42.

Of course, gathering and analyzing the performance measures are pointless activities if the information is not put to use. Agencies and programs should take the performance information they gained and use it to improve, allocate and incentivize. Data that reveal areas that the agency could improve should be noted and further analyzed to understand why the deficiency occurred and what can be done to improve in the future.

For the purpose of public engagement under the MIP project, there have been several opportunities for local agencies to assess their performance with regard to public engagement and their specific regions and corridors:

May 2012 The Public Engagement Report for the MIP project reviewed progress toward public engagement at that time, presented best practices and case examples, and offered recommendations to help agencies ensure that their public engagement activities are meaningful, credible, productive and successful.

September 2012 MIP project regional coordinators completed a checklist for each priority corridor, including an assessment of public engagement activities and progress.

Spring 2013 MIP project regional coordinators updated their checklists for each priority corridor, again including an assessment of public engagement activities and progress. This check-in report serves as an additional opportunity to assess progress for the regions and individual corridors.

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The point of this check-in is to reaffirm the importance of public engagement efforts for the MIP project overall: acknowledge best practice and progress to date, identify opportunities for improvement, and share lessons learned between regions and corridors.

**Prior Recommendation: Follow Eight Steps/Four Principles as Guidelines**

Getting the general public excited about transportation infrastructure investments and improvements can be a tricky task. Some people may feel as if their opinions do not make a difference. Others may feel that they cannot afford the time. Long-term transportation planning can be especially difficult since projects are considered and approved many years before they open. Nonetheless, transportation improvements impact the everyday quality of life for Americans. The fact that these projects have such a large impact creates an imperative for engaging the public and enabling community members to have a voice in the decision-making process.

The May 2012 Public Engagement Report provided a list of eight steps to achieve the goals of Rider 42 with respect to public engagement. They are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statewide</th>
<th>Statewide/Regional/Local</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eight Steps for Effective Public Engagement</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Communicate with all stakeholder groups content that is based upon polling results and project information produced through the MIP project.</td>
<td>Ensure that public engagement efforts at all levels are funded at a level sufficient to ensure that communication efforts with all audiences are thorough, and that feedback from those audiences is accurate and meaningful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue polling to ensure that changes in public opinion are understood and reflected in ongoing public engagement efforts.</td>
<td>Expand the use of technology in public engagement.</td>
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The above steps provide the map. Four principles were introduced in the May 2012 report to guide the choice of specific strategies to apply in following the above steps. According to the 2012 report, the “Four Best Principles” for successful public engagement include:

1. Accessible events.
2. Engaging interactions.
4. An outcome-oriented process.

The four principles are unique yet often link together in strategies for providing quality public participation. For example, some aspects of making events accessible may require using many different strategies to encourage turnout, like inviting individuals to participate through print, online and in-person communications. It is important to understand that each principle should not be used in isolation but can often apply to aspects of the other principles as well. These principles were discussed in depth in the original report, and examples of specific implementations were provided from successful public engagement efforts. Specific strategies were provided as examples, but do not represent requirements. These examples were provided both in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report, as well as part of the Public Engagement section of the MIP Web site at: http://mobility.tamu.edu/mip/strategies.php#public. These guidelines for attaining the four best principles were provided to help practitioners identify appropriate strategies for their projects and areas.

Assessment Criteria
Assessing progress on public engagement activities is qualitative. The first step is to examine where each region was in terms of public engagement at the previous milestone of May 2012, the date of the first Public Engagement report. Then the current state of public engagement activities is summarized and assessed. Examples are presented to support the evaluation. The evaluation relies primarily upon an assessment of public engagement information presented by the lead transportation agencies in each region with regard to: use of project-specific public engagement plans and the consistency of the efforts between agencies in the same area. The following criteria are specifically addressed, the first two as stand-alone chapters and the latter criteria within individual chapters on progress for each region.

Criterion: Coordinate a Broad Public Awareness Campaign on State’s Mobility Crisis
Of the eight steps presented in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report provided, the first four steps are clearly statewide initiatives. These efforts are evaluated together in the next chapter of this report, with respect to efforts that the MIP project team and TxDOT together have undertaken at the state level to promote public discussion and understanding of the mobility crisis confronting the State of Texas. Steps 5 through 8 are necessary at statewide, regional, and corridor levels and are evaluated as part of the criteria below at these various levels. Because of its nature in being a statewide need, this criterion, to coordinate a broad public awareness campaign on the state’s mobility crisis, is evaluated in a separate chapter from the other criteria.
**Criterion: Provide Clear Project Information, Consistent Across Projects**
To achieve the public engagement objectives of Rider 42, project information about all the projects in the MIP most-congested list (the top 50 on TxDOT’s 100 Most Congested Roadways List in 2010) should include components that allow the public to contribute informed input about their preferences. This information should be accompanied by maps, illustrations, renderings and other media as appropriate. The assessment of this criterion is straightforward: this information should be available as part of the MIP Web site and consistent with information provided on any project-specific Web sites, as well as regional or local agency Web sites.

**Criterion: Coordinate a Regional, Programmatic Approach**
In the evaluation which follows, the regions are considered with regard to their coordination between lead transportation agencies and evaluated based upon the level of consistency among regional public engagement efforts by multiple agencies. Regional partnership efforts are also considered.

**Criterion: Application of Project-specific Public Engagement Strategies**
In the evaluation which follows, individual projects by region are examined to determine the use of a project-specific public engagement plan (or inclusion of specific public engagement activities as part of a scope of work for a contractor).

**Criterion: Leverage Next Generation Strategies**
In many cases, the agencies have extensive information about a particular project or improvement, and yet this information is only reaching a small proportion of the people who may be affected by the project. As described in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, next generation strategies are an additional platform for increasing accessibility and engagement for all stakeholders. Alongside the above assessments, this check-in examines the level of effort that each corridor team and region have devoted to leveraging additional best practice strategies, as presented in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report.

**Report Organization**
The following report is organized as follows: the first two chapters assess efforts on a statewide basis:

- Raising Public Awareness Statewide on Texas’ Mobility Challenge
- Providing Clear, Consistent Project Information Statewide

The remaining chapters examine efforts at the regional level, with individual criteria assessed by region:

- Criterion: Coordinate a Regional, Programmatic Approach
- Criterion: Application of Project-specific Public Engagement Strategies
- Criterion: Leverage Next Generation Strategies.

The report concludes with a chapter summarizing key challenges of public engagement noted, with recommendations to encourage continued improvement.
RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS STATEWIDE ON TEXAS’ MOBILITY CHALLENGE

Introduction
As described in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, the public is largely unaware of the impending crisis of mobility for the State of Texas. They are unaware of and unengaged in any potential solutions to address the mobility challenge arising from the state’s “perfect storm” of increasing jobs and population, aging infrastructure, and declining funding projections. The further complication is decreasing faith by the American public that their tax dollars will be spent wisely in addressing this challenge. The public is less likely to support a transportation project for which they see no urgent need or personal benefit. Communicating that need and personal benefit is a fundamental requirement for the agencies responsible for these projects, and doing so effectively will require a more proactive and inclusive approach than agencies have taken previously. Moreover, it requires a consistent and coordinated effort and messaging from the agencies responsible for providing transportation services in Texas.

Of the eight principles to achieve the goals of Rider 42 with respect to public engagement, the first four steps are most appropriately initiated and sustained at the state level:

1. Initiate a broad public discussion to raise awareness of the state’s mobility crisis and to begin building public consensus toward solutions.
2. Sustain the discussion through means of an assertive public education campaign to help citizens and voters understand the magnitude of the state’s mobility crisis and the consequences of inaction.
3. Communicate with all stakeholder groups content that is based upon polling results and project information produced through the MIP project.
4. Continue polling to ensure that changes in public opinion are understood and reflected in ongoing public engagement efforts.

These efforts are evaluated together with respect to efforts that the MIP project team and TxDOT together have undertaken at the state level to promote public discussion and understanding of the mobility crisis confronting the State of Texas. The above steps can be consolidated to two areas for evaluation, as discussed below.

Initiate and Sustain an Awareness and Education Program on Texas’ Mobility Crisis
Numerous construction projects across the state belie the fact that Texas faces an impending mobility crisis. While driving is increasing, fuel tax revenues are declining due to increased fuel efficiency. Moreover, the gas tax has not been increased since 1991 so the purchasing power of the revenues available has eroded due to increased cost and inflation. The gap between needs and available funds continues to widen. In 2003, the voters elected to give TxDOT the authority to bond transportation projects but the state has reached its borrowing capacity. The public is largely unaware of this “perfect
storm,” as illustrated by research that places transportation low on the list of voter concerns. This lack of awareness is compounded by a basic lack of understanding of how transportation is funded, and why the current funding method is unsustainable. To further complicate the mobility-needs issue, polls have shown that Americans generally have little faith that their transportation tax dollars will be spent wisely. Collectively, these factors underscore the need for a carefully focused public education and engagement effort.

TTI has developed a statewide public education and engagement plan that addresses these challenges. The plan, known as RPM (Rethinking Our Path to Mobility), has a specific brand that will easily identify it as a fresh approach to addressing the state’s transportation challenges. The goal of this plan is to promote a better understanding of the state’s transportation infrastructure condition among interested Texans, helping them to contribute informed views on policy decisions that will determine how the state’s most urgent transportation needs will be met, and how they will be paid for.

The plan outlined here is designed to meet that goal by doing three things:

1. Explaining the extent and consequences of the state’s transportation challenges.
2. Outlining specific project solution options and their benefits to the public (benefits will be described on a community level and at an individual or personal level).
3. Determining which, if any, transportation funding methods the public finds most acceptable.

**Education Program Identity and Ownership**

The theme “RPM: Rethinking Our Path to Mobility” is intended to:

- Convey that the state’s growing population and shrinking revenue forecasts are requiring us to reconsider how Texas provides and pays for the roadways upon which our economic prosperity and quality of life depend.
- Emphasize that finding the best path forward is achieved through public understanding of our challenges and options and public support of solutions.
- Reinforce that greater mobility is the ultimate goal.
- Employ a well-recognized visual element – a vehicle’s tachometer – to establish a picture for program audiences that is memorable and helps to build and sustain the program’s identity and purpose.
- Establish the ownership and sponsorship of the program through a broad collection of statewide and local leaders in each region (see grassroots network below, “movers and doers”). The intent is to position this effort as something distinct, and to insulate the effort from audience biases toward TxDOT or other entities which may have developed over time.
**Audience Segmentation**

This effort identifies specific audiences and ensures that informational materials are developed appropriately for each group. Specific audiences include, but may not be limited to:

- Everyday transportation consumers.
- Neighborhood and civic groups.
- Business groups and individuals.
- Policy professionals.
- Planning and operating agency staff.
- News media.

Test informational materials with representative members of each audience to ensure that the materials are understandable and effective.

Conduct focus groups in the four major metropolitan areas to gauge levels of awareness and understanding and effectiveness of public education efforts. Adjust education efforts and materials accordingly.

**Program Content – What information do we bring to our audiences?**

A platform of core messages that encourage audience members to become engaged, become well-informed and become active participants in deciding the state’s transportation future will be established. The message development will reflect the findings of research activities being conducted under the Rider 42 project.

Develop informational materials designed primarily for an audience of transportation “consumers” based upon research and project information produced by TTI will be developed. The informational materials should focus on:

- Needs and urgency – especially in areas where construction is underway, as the appearance of roadway building or expansion can create a disconnect between perception and reality. Lots of highly visible orange construction barrels may suggest that all is good, even though these may be the last orange barrels anyone sees in the foreseeable future.

- Funding trends – since 1990 and out to 2030/35; show decline in future revenue that is expected.

- Relevance – both to the state in general and to the individual citizen.

- Corridor solutions (where they have been determined) and corridor ideas (where they are under discussion) and the direct benefits that those solutions will deliver based on research results from the public opinion survey.

- Funding options, and the implications of those options on both a statewide and personal level.
• Links between mobility and quality of life, as well as mobility and jobs/economic prosperity, on both a statewide and personal level.

• Success stories and examples of effective use of existing resources toward road projects, traffic operations and travel demand management.

Educational materials will include, but not be limited to:

• Scripted group presentations in PowerPoint and other forms.

• Printed collateral materials to augment presentations.

• Video public service messages (primarily for web use).

• Public service messages for radio.

• Outdoor messages.

• Web site banners.

• Media releases and talking points.

• Guest editorials.

• Survey results.

As needed, develop informational materials in Spanish.

Program Channels – How do we bring the information to our audiences?

Grassroots/community-based engagement

There is a need to enlist and continually expand a network of movers and doers to interact with various community segments that they represent or have credibility with. Some opinion leaders will be obvious, but others less so, and one essential key is to engage those less obvious influencers (a high school principal, a Junior League officer, etc.) who in some circles may have far more credibility with some audiences than the elected officials or local transportation agencies.

• Statewide stakeholder groups (Keep Texas Working, Texas Association of Realtors, Texas Association of Business, etc.), extending to community-level members.

• Civic organization leadership.

• Local elected leadership.

• Religious leadership.

• Other credible messengers identified through ongoing program management.

Strategies should be developed for the network to have meaningful interaction with community segments. For example, the Missouri DOT enlisted a community leaders’ network to travel throughout the state to draw attention to that state’s needs and collect public input.
Present corridor and project information to community audiences in a way that illustrates various scenarios and options regarding present and potential transportation funding levels. Present clear choices. The Minnesota DOT has employed this approach to collect public input on roadway investments, offering stakeholders three different options in prioritizing maintenance and mobility at varying levels.

Develop and distribute information periodically to the network regarding the Rider 42 effort and similar corridor-specific initiatives reflecting progress on a project and how it relates to relevant audiences. Specifically, this will include updated information on project planning in progress, results from outreach efforts such as public meetings and/or open houses, and research results from activities such as the public preference survey. This will enable the network to connect directly with their audience on the issues that are important to them in their community.

Identify and actively engage opposition groups.

Monitor and maintain records of outreach by the network, as well as reaction from the public.

**Web site Focus**
- Develop a Web site, to be hosted and maintained by TTI, to serve as the “go-to” location for all information materials for the education program.
- Ensure consistency and timeliness in the preparation of materials and periodic updates of information.
- Feature links to metro area planning/TxDOT or project office Web sites.
- Provide a channel for public comment and ensure prompt responses to feedback (when necessary and/or appropriate).
- Document feedback.

**News Media Focus**
- Coordinate regional media announcements to lay out each region’s particular transportation conditions and how Rider 42 efforts and similar initiatives are addressing specific needs.
- Provide for updated announcements to help ensure sustained media efforts.
- Coordinate editorial board meetings with major newspapers to present needs, solutions and funding options.
- Establish and/or build upon relationships with key news media representatives.
- Manage ongoing releases/events to generate news coverage and build greater awareness and understanding in the four major metropolitan areas.
- Develop periodic releases for media outside the congested regions, when appropriate, to support statewide issues and messages.
• Monitor ongoing media coverage and produce periodic analyses illustrating the volume, content and tone of that coverage. Use these analyses to adjust education program channels, messages, materials and tactics as appropriate.

Social Media Focus
• Utilize social media to provide information to all audience segments, including the use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.
• Monitor and document public input collected through social media.
• Respond, as appropriate, to public input collected through web and social media.
• Identify social media leaders to help provide information on Facebook and Twitter.

Evaluation
Education program effectiveness will be measured through a variety of means, including documentation of community group interactions, tracking of online audience feedback and responses, and news media content analysis. Ongoing evaluation will provide insight for periodic adjustments in the program.

Education Program Status
As of April 2013, the MIP project team had vetted the RPM Public Education Plan with key stakeholders. A PowerPoint presentation has been developed (also vetted with stakeholders) to serve as a ‘conversation starter’ for the general audience of transportation consumers in the state’s most congested regions. The presentation focuses broadly on the state’s mobility challenges and implications, statewide and personal consequences of worsening congestion, and available options for addressing the problem. Other presentations will be built upon the initial presentation, so that additional detail in certain areas (finance options, for instance) can be provided once a broader awareness of the issues is achieved.

In addition, initial work on a series of web-based video messages has begun, to be hosted on the RPM Web site, rpm-texas.org (expected to be functional in August 2013).

Communicate with Stakeholder Groups Based Upon Informed Polling
Communicating statewide issues is addressed through the effort to initiate and sustain the discussion about Texas’ mobility challenges and opportunities. Previous research indicates that most people are not aware of how transportation is funded nor do they have even an order of magnitude idea of transportation costs. There is a need to understand if, and under what circumstances, the public might be supportive of paying for increased funding for transportation. The research informs not only the message development but can also identify specific issues that are important to specific user groups. For example, residents of the Houston area may feel that their current investment in transportation is providing them quality service and products; whereas residents of San Antonio may feel as if transportation in their region has been underfunded. The data collected from a random sample of Texas residents can provide statistically significant, quantifiable answers to questions that inform and focus outreach efforts. To help decision-makers understand their constituents’ issues it is necessary to
collect data that provides these answers. Considering this effort, several overarching themes emerged. These included:

- How is transportation currently funded?
  - How and how much do you pay personally for transportation? We might explore their knowledge of taxes and operating expenses, time in their car, etc.
- Are you satisfied with what you are getting?
- Do you think there is a need to improve transportation in your area?
- How should transportation improvements be paid for?
- Is there a need for geographic equity?
- Which agencies are most capable of implementing new projects?
- Does it make a difference if specific projects, budgets, timelines and benefits are identified?

As part of a separate research effort, the TTI research team has developed a survey instrument and identified a survey design that seeks to answer many of these questions. A random sample of 4,500 residents across the state will be queried about their knowledge of transportation funding in general, their acceptability of specific projects and their preferred method(s) of how to pay for these projects. The sample will be representative so the results can be indicative of the larger Texas’ population.

**Assessment of Efforts**

This above assessment summarizes the success of efforts to date by the MIP project team and TxDOT to raise broad public awareness of the mobility challenges being faced by all Texans, so that they more effectively participate in finding solutions and support their funding and implementation as needed. Progress has been made. Additional progress will be demonstrated by subsequent deliverables, as outlined above.
PROVIDING CLEAR, CONSISTENT PROJECT INFORMATION STATEWIDE

Introduction
The Mobility Investment Priorities project specifically addresses the top 50 corridors on TxDOT’s 100 Most Congested Roadways List from 2010. To achieve the public engagement objectives of MIP, project information about each of the projects to address these corridors should include components that allow the public to make informed decisions about their preferences. This information should be accompanied by maps, illustrations, renderings and other media as appropriate.

The assessment of this criterion is straightforward: this information should be available as part of the MIP Web site and consistent with information provided on any project-specific Web sites, as well as regional or local agency Web sites.

MIP Web site Project Information

To achieve the public engagement objectives of Rider 42, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) has been working with agencies and their consultants to develop project information for the priority corridors that is both clear and consistent. The MIP Web site includes overview maps of all of the 50 corridors under consideration by the MIP effort, located at: http://mobility.tamu.edu/mip/congestion.php.

In addition, each of these overview maps includes hyperlinks to individual corridor descriptions summarized in a consistent format and including:

- Corridor name and limits.
- 2010 rank in the most congested corridors list.
- Location map.
- Current conditions, including various statistics on congestion.
- Identification of possible congestion causes.
- Descriptions of projects in progress or completed.
- Planning efforts to date, including public engagement efforts.
- Next steps.

These Web site corridor descriptions fulfill part of this key public engagement objective to provide a clear, consistent project description between projects. The
second part of this objective also included consistency with the lead agency description of effort at the regional level. This aspect is assured at the regional coordinator level of the MIP project team.

**Strategies**
In addition to identification and description of the congested corridors and potential projects, the MIP site brings together a consistent, unifying definition of the various strategies that may be considered to address mobility issues statewide. These are located at: [http://mobility.tamu.edu/mip/strategies.php](http://mobility.tamu.edu/mip/strategies.php).

The improvement strategies are catalogued according to categories such as traffic management, travel options, etc. Other strategies included via the same page include funding and public engagement approaches. Each of the strategies is summarized in an Executive Summary, typically two pages, with additional information provided as Technical Information. The strategies are presented in a consistent format and tone for use by local agencies to communicate different possible approaches for specific corridor application.

**Assessment of Efforts**
As described above, the assessment of this criterion considers if this information is available as part of the MIP Web site and consistent with information provided on any project-specific Web sites, as well as regional or local agency Web sites. At the date of this check-in, it does appear that the MIP Web site project descriptions are consistent with information currently provided on project-specific Web sites, as well as regional or local agency Web sites. The MIP Web site presently provides a single location where these most congested corridor descriptions may be found in this format; in some cases, these are the only corridor descriptions available, as there are no current activities for some of the corridors.
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS: AUSTIN REGION

Introduction
Agencies in each of the state’s most congested regions conduct public engagement activities that vary in nature and scope. The following sections describe ongoing public engagement efforts known by the Rider 42 team for the Austin region. Where applicable, the numbers in parenthesis indicate the 2010 rank of the congested corridor in the top 50.

At the regional level in Austin, a variety of entities are coordinating efforts to address congestion for this area’s most congested corridors according to Rider 42. Most predominant among those planning and implementing transportation solutions are the following:

Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO)
http://www.campotexas.org/index.php

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Austin District and the Corridor Program Office

Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA)
http://www.mobilityauthority.com/

Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Capital Metro)
http://www.capmetro.org/

City of Austin (COA)
http://austintexas.gov/

For IH 35 in particular, this project in the Austin metropolitan area involves three key parties: the City of Austin, TxDOT, and the IH 35 Corridor Program Office, which is a project-specific team contracted to TxDOT. As of spring 2012, a study supporting intermediate-term (5-10 year) improvements to IH 35 in the Austin metropolitan area continues under several linked efforts, but guided primarily by the TxDOT Austin District and supported by the other two parties mentioned above.

Additional agencies include counties, other cities, other transit providers, as well as other types of transportation operations such as rail and air. The list above denotes those most directly involved in the implementation of public engagement efforts for the MIP corridors.

Assessment of Regional Effort
This section of the report evaluates the above region according to the following criteria:

- Coordinates public engagement activities as part of a regional, programmatic approach.
- Applies project-specific public engagement strategies.
- Leverages next generation strategies.
Criterion: Coordinate a Regional, Programmatic Approach

Several individual agency efforts exhibit advanced approaches and coordination among specific projects. For example, the CTRMA demonstrates a consistency of approach and level of effort across various projects. Nonetheless, formal public engagement coordination for the Austin region on the overall regional transportation vision for the community is primarily conducted by CAMPO, as the MPO and coordinator for regional transportation projects.

The CAMPO Regional Transportation Plan represents the coordinated vision for the Austin metropolitan area for the year 2035. The CAMPO public participation plan describes the public engagement activities CAMPO employs to provide the public opportunities for input on planning processes including the regional transportation plan. The process, as described in the CAMPO public participation plan, is a tiered approach whereby each tier represents minimum outreach techniques to be employed by initiative. For example, a planning effort with a tier of “3” (on a scale of four tiers “Administrative”, “1”, “2”, “3”) represents the highest commitment of public participation engagement by the agency. For each of the four tiers, CAMPO’s public participation plan describes methods of public engagement which meet the minimum for that tier; these, generally state of practice public engagement strategies are categorized as “getting the word out,” “high-touch,” “high-tech,” and “communicating results.” Specific strategies include a strong electronic and web-based component, such as electronic notifications, online publications such as an email notification and newsletter list, and comment opportunities for specific initiatives. Additional components include face-to-face interactions in public meetings, visualization techniques to improve communication of information, and summaries of comments and how comments were addressed. Social media outlets include Facebook and Twitter. More information is available at: http://www.campotexas.org/programs_pip.php.

Examples of additional coordinated public engagement efforts for specific initiatives in the region include the following:

- Commute Solutions - Sponsored by CAMPO, this program includes various public and private partners, including all of the key transportation agencies listed above, other agencies invested in improving transportation for their constituencies, as well as a number of large employers. The objective of the program is to promote alternative transportation options to the single-occupancy auto mode. More information is available at: http://www.commutesolutions.com/.

- Project Connect - A partnership including CAMPO, the City of Austin, Capital Metro, and the Lone Star Rail District to develop and implement a regional high-capacity transit system. More information is available at: http://www.connectcentraltexas.org/.

- Movability Austin - A Transportation Management Association (TMA), this collaboration of public and private sector employers, property owners, and transportation system users coordinates programs and services to improve mobility in downtown Austin. Partners include several of the above key transportation agencies and others. More information is available at: http://movabilityaustin.org/.
As referenced in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report, the City of Austin’s recent comprehensive plan “Imagine Austin” was named a national best practice for “Building a Community Vision with Sustained Community Engagement” by the Alliance for Innovation. While the plan is not solely dedicated to transportation planning, two factors make it worth consideration: it provides an excellent example of how the four principles and many of the strategies for successful public engagement can transfer seamlessly to transportation projects. The Imagine Austin process depended on community members to shape and develop the core ideas for the city’s plan. The city held four main forums that mined the community for input and integrated the input to create the vision. The forums progressed through four main steps, with each building on the progress of the previous steps:

- General visioning of the community’s aspirations for city development over the next 20 years.
- Discussion of how and where the city is growing now and likely future scenarios.
- Identification of the choices to change course in the direction of the vision.
- Working groups to complete surveys and further refine the scenarios.

This process above demonstrates how a program can use public input to develop its plan even on as large a scale as an entire city. The City of Austin took the information gathered in the forums, organized it and presented it in subsequent forums for the next group to further develop and refine. Throughout the entire process, the city engaged residents and stakeholders in other methods (like public opinion surveys and online engagement) to target specific populations and include them in the process. The May 2012 Public Engagement report provides much more detail on specific aspects of the Imagine Austin process. In addition, more information is available at: http://www.austintexas.gov/imagineaustin.

When it comes to specific project development efforts for transportation, these obviously involve specific public engagement efforts and coordination among the agencies involved. What appears to be lacking is a shared, consistent approach amongst agencies region wide for public engagement. For example, stakeholder groups are gathered and disbanded for individual studies, without any clear indication that stakeholder input and ideas are retained for future efforts, or communicated to the appropriate agency if pertinent to related initiatives on the regional scale. Some studies include open houses, others online discussion forums, still others rely upon the web for public communication. And these are all occurring on separate platforms and Web sites, without a clear roadmap to how these various efforts are related in time or across agencies. Some studies’ Web sites are still live, offering valuable information and yet the introductory wording suggests the study is still active at the same time that the final report is complete. The coordination challenges will only be exacerbated as web pages continue to multiply over time and the information available online increases. A regional, programmatic-level coordination of public engagement efforts could include, for instance, a calendar of public
engagement events by the various agencies on transportation efforts in the region, at least on the 50 most congested roadways, to start. This same web page could also include references to project-specific web pages on the projects and agencies coordinating such studies.

**Criterion: Application of Project-specific Public Engagement Strategies**

Individual projects by region and their associated public engagement strategies were summarized in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report. Here, each of the region’s corridors are re-examined with regard to current and planned outreach and communication efforts. Both project-specific public engagement plans and inclusion of specific public engagement activities as part of a scope of work for a contractor are considered.

Generally, the projects with ongoing studies offer Web sites which provide timely information to at least a state-of-the-practice level. CTRMA’s Web sites for the following projects are exemplary:


For example, the project-specific Mopac Express Web site includes a brief history of SL 1 (MoPac), which sets a context for the public viewing the information about the SL 1 North project, FAQs and traffic management plans for the imminent construction. The SL 1 South information on CTRMA’s main Web site is more limited because of the stage of the project, and yet it informs the public about where that project is in study (environmental and community outreach activities to start soon).

US 290, now called the Oak Hill Parkway, also provides extensive information on its project-specific web page, including project-specific logo, multimedia information, study contacts and updates on the study. In addition, TxDOT and CTRMA recently (May 2013) hosted a virtual open house with real-time live chat opportunities. This was an effort to leverage existing outreach, broaden the reach of traditional outreach and demonstrate new technology. By all accounts, the pilot was a success, attracting 725 visits and 659 unique visits.

The City of Austin’s Web site for the IH 35 study is also notable for its quality, depth of information and opportunity to provide input via an online discussion forum (described in more detail below):

- IH 35 (#4) at [http://www.mobility35.org/](http://www.mobility35.org/)

As noted above, for IH 35 in particular, the IH 35 project in the Austin metropolitan area involves three key parties: the City of Austin, TxDOT, and the Corridor Program Office. As of spring 2012, a study supporting intermediate-term (5-10 year) improvements to IH 35 in the Austin metropolitan area continues, under several efforts, but guided primarily by the TxDOT Austin District at this time and supported by the other two parties mentioned above.

A notable difficulty was in finding web pages for less prominent projects, for example for a citizen searching for information on the following Austin region highly congested corridors:
With the information that North Lamar corridor improvements may be funded by City of Austin Transportation Bonds, a web search of “North Lamar city bond program” did yield a web page: http://www.austintexas.gov/department/2012-bond-program. The information on this page suggests that North Lamar is a representative corridor which may benefit from the 2012 bond election. By clicking through several links, a user finds an Austin Mobility webpage focused upon “Corridor Development North Lamar Boulevard/Burnet Road” at http://www.austin-mobility.com/corridor-development-north-lamar-boulevard-burnet-road. Unfortunately, the information on this webpage appears outdated, referencing handouts from a January 2012 meeting. Given that these corridors are on the state’s most highly congested corridor list, it is reasonable that this information be referred to directly from a single location with other highly congested corridors. For projects for which there is no current ongoing study or webpage, these corridors should be acknowledged in some way, if only to reference the corridor summary produced for the MIP effort from the TxDOT district web page.

Lesson: Communication Challenges Across Multiple Implementing Agencies

A complexity of the transportation field is the number of agencies involved in corridor improvements, even in a single corridor. Many of the agencies have limitations on the types of projects they can implement, leading to confusion when an agency sets out to perform a corridor study with the intention of not predisposing its solution. One example is the CTRMA, whose funding mechanism for any potential mobility solution likely includes tolling. Another is Capital Metro, whose potential mobility solutions are generally in the public transit sphere. These issues are sensitive and necessitate careful attention in public engagement efforts.

An additional critical aspect to the communication challenge in this regard is that a solution for a corridor may, in many cases, involve implementation by multiple agencies. For example, user groups of Express Lanes often include the local transit authority, in terms of express bus service. Or, a local downtown stakeholder group or Chamber of Commerce may play a key role in facilitating City funding for improved ramp access to a facility being built primarily by TxDOT. There are a variety of ways that multiple agencies can be involved in mobility improvement at the regional and corridor level, and communicating these roles to the public is important.

Lesson: Communication Challenges Across Multiple Studies

At the heart of a project-specific public engagement approach is understanding project context. The Mobility35 study for the IH 35 corridor through Austin demonstrates one of the key findings from this MIP Public Engagement assessment effort: for many of the MIP corridors, online project presence is often defined by and limited to a current study. If previous studies of the corridor are referenced, those previous studies appear only rarely to have informed current study activities.

That is, there is very little acknowledgement, among the public engagement efforts examined, of previous study efforts of the same corridor. This can be confusing for the public if alternate Web sites
Concerning the same corridor exist. One example is the current City of Austin Mobility35 study in the Austin metropolitan area and the My35 statewide effort by TxDOT. If stakeholders recall and participated in previous studies, they may be discouraged that their input is not informing the current effort, or decide that there is a reason that the previous study is not being mentioned. Most conspicuously, if a previous study resulted in a No Build decision based upon decision factors at that time, or if a study was interrupted, it may hurt agency credibility if those prior study efforts are not acknowledged, either as a point-in-time decision or for lessons learned. For example, a web search yields handouts for a public meeting on innovative intersection improvements held on November 1, 2011, for the SL 360 (#42); however, it is unclear to a public user of the TxDOT Web site what additional steps have been taken for SL 360 after that point.

Specifically for the IH 35 corridor through Austin (#4), the general public may be confused about how the My35 and Mobility35 studies are related and this issue should be addressed. Generally, all of the study efforts along IH 35 in recent history should be at least referenced in a project history on each new study’s webpage. And, older study Web sites should be maintained to reference newer efforts. At a minimum, study close-out should include a final update to a publically available webpage that explains the conclusion of the study and refers users to a web location for the latest information. Ideally, these sites should be merged and redesigned for ease of use by the public.

**Criterion: Leverage Next Generation Strategies**

In many cases, the agencies have extensive information about a particular project or improvement, and yet this information is only reaching a small proportion of the people who may be affected by the project. As described in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, next generation strategies are an additional platform for increasing accessibility and engagement for all stakeholders. Alongside the above assessments, this check-in examines the level of effort that each corridor team and region have devoted to leveraging additional best practice strategies, as presented in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report.

Use of next generation strategies is incorporated as part of the assessment of application of the four best principles for successful public engagement, described previously:

1. Accessible events.
2. Engaging interactions.
4. An outcome-oriented process.

Successful incorporation of these advanced public engagement tools adds to the value of the decision-making process. These tools are not meant to replace, but rather, augment traditional approaches. It is necessary for agencies to recognize the changing methods of communication and incorporate them into their public engagement plans.
CTRMA: Setting the Bar for Project-Specific Webpages

Meeting all four of the best principles, the CTRMA Web site is particularly dynamic, engaging and informative. The latest news is highlighted in a header across the top of the webpage. The navigation is intuitive and the presentation is professional. The “Translate” button is small, but translation is available in multiple languages via Google Translate. Unfortunately, text in graphics and links are not available through Google Translate; as a result, much of the information delivered as text on the webpage (including the FAQs, which are helpful) is translated, however items such as flyers and public meeting materials appear to be available only in English.

CTRMA Home Page.

Figure 1. CTRMA Home Page.

CTRMA: Incorporating Engaging Activities

The most progressive initiatives on the public and stakeholder engagement front in the Austin region appear to be those of the CTRMA, including such notable efforts as:

- Green Mobility Challenge (for which TxDOT was a partner) held in July 2011 to identify sustainable approaches for two area corridors, one of which was US 290 (#43).
- Oak Hill Envisioning Mobility Workshop held in August 2012 specifically for US 290 (#43).
- Express Lanes Workshop held in September 2012 for local stakeholders.
The reason that these initiatives are considered highlights is because they demonstrate re-framing the question being asked by the agency involved toward a more open-ended question to the community and users of the specific corridor regarding needs and the purpose for any improvement.

**CTRMA and TxDOT: Offering Multiple Platforms for Engagement**

As noted earlier, CTRMA and TxDOT jointly participated in two pilot projects that implemented, tested and evaluated new technologies to improve participation in the transportation planning process. As part of the traditional open house for the Oak Hill Parkway, the project partners, including TTI, provided a forum for a virtual open house. The unique feature of the virtual open house was the ability to engage in a live chat with project personnel. The purpose was to replicate the same experience as attending a traditional open house. Visitors to the virtual open house saw the same displays as the traditional open house. The displays are in the form of a video with narration by a project team member. After watching the videos visitors could discuss the concepts amongst themselves through a discussion box and/or they could ask a question of the project team via the chat box. They also expressed their feelings about particular concepts by giving the concepts a “thumbs-up” or “thumbs-down.”

TxDOT also successfully used new technology in creating and hosting a virtual open house held in conjunction with traditional open houses for the IH 35 project in April and in June. This virtual open house was very successful, attracting over 700 visitors for the June time period. This virtual open house did not include the real-time live chat component of the Oakhill Parkway project but project sponsors should consider incorporating that element in future virtual open houses.

A similar virtual open house is also being developed for use in conjunction with the Bergstrom Expressway public meeting. Because public meetings are an official part of the environmental review process, the project team must ensure regulatory compliance with how comments are submitted. This pilot test is the first time this technology and approach has been used in Texas.

**City of Austin and TxDOT: Demonstrating an Advanced Practice Strategy**

The City of Austin and TxDOT are the lead partners with other transportation agencies in the region working on a study to examine IH 35, generally along the limits between SH 45 North and SH 45 Southeast.

As described on the project Web site referenced above, the first efforts on the currently active IH 35 study focused upon a study area bounded by William Cannon and US 290 E. After three public workshops and numerous stakeholder meetings and evaluation of preliminary improvement concepts, these limits have been expanded. More information is available at: [http://www.mobility35.org/](http://www.mobility35.org/). The purpose of the study is “to identify effective short- (3-5 years) to mid-term strategies (6-10 years) to improve mobility and connectivity for all modes of transportation...along and across the IH 35 corridor in the Capital Area.” Long-term, large-scale improvements are explicitly not pursued under this study.
Of note, the webpage for Mobility35 includes a state of the art public engagement tool, called “Speak Up for Mobility”, a forum whereby visitors to the site can make comments, vote, and discuss their concerns about IH 35 and the study. The Speak Up site activity as of April 2013 included 98 users. This was a significant increase associated with the April open houses.

Generally, the site has not been utilized to its full potential due to the difficulty in receiving agency approvals to post information. However, the forum is a very credible way to provide the opportunity for transparent discussion and commentary.

Next generation public engagement activities reflect the way people communicate in today’s world. The public is often subjected to information overload. That is why it is important to provide information in a way that is accessible and engaging. Social networking sites are rapidly becoming the primary source of news and information for many people. For communication via this medium it is imperative that agency staff have the ability to interact with users. One of the primary features of Facebook or Twitter is the immediacy of the information. If users do not receive responses to their inquiries in a timely manner they will discount the usefulness of this mechanism as a tool to communicate with agencies. A primary component of a site such as the SpeakUp4Mobility site is to encourage and engage in the interactive nature of the site. The intent is to get a deeper understanding of the issues that are important to the community. This is achieved via the interaction amongst contributors themselves as well as the engagement of the sponsoring agency. These types of sites are intended to leverage the problem-solving and creative thinking of a broad group of people. One of the many benefits is the freedom people have to comment from the comfort of their own computer or mobile device. But if the site moderator is unable to meaningfully interact with participants the credibility of the agency suffers. Users will feel as if their comments and ideas are not valued and they are being merely placated. Agency staff and/or their consultant should be enabled to actively engage with participants in meaningful two-way dialogue in a timely manner. Canned responses are easily recognized by users, as is the level of effort being expended to engage.

Next Steps
Public engagement is one of the more challenging aspects of transportation planning and solutions implementation. Ironically, these efforts are complicated by the coordination of these planning efforts by several agencies. The Austin region demonstrates some best practice examples of public engagement at the project-specific level, as described above, as well as some opportunities for improvement. Certainly, the largest identified gap in public engagement excellence for the Austin region is that of a regional, programmatic approach. Public engagement efforts appear to be focused at the project-level and are entirely dependent upon the proposed project sponsor and the perspective of that agency on the role of public engagement in the project development process. In addition, the Austin region generally does well in incorporating web-based communication strategies for projects; incorporation of public engagement input in the outcome of the projects appears less tangible, or at
least harder to demonstrate. Overall for the region, the CTRMA appears to be setting the bar for best practice with regard to:

- Quality of web communication.
- Stakeholder and public engagement meetings.
- Alternative activities to promote stakeholder engagement (Green Mobility Challenge, Express Lanes Workshop).

For all of the agencies referenced including the CTRMA, it should be noted that, if or when certain projects advance in the project development stage, it is critical to maintain the connection with the public to maintain public confidence in the chosen strategy. Web sites mentioned above for project information must be updated regularly or include clear messaging referring to study completion and a reference for further information.

For IH 35 specifically, as the Austin region’s most congested corridor and number four in ranking in the state, as the current project development effort for short-term improvements transitions from the City of Austin to TxDOT, it is critical that these agencies coordinate a seamless transition of public engagement activities. Ongoing efforts by the City of Austin for any additional studies along this corridor should also continue to be coordinated. For example, stakeholder groups and mailing lists identified under the City of Austin study should be provided to and used for future public engagement mailings and activities. In addition, the study Web site should either continue to be maintained consistent with the prior study or a clear note be added which informs users that the study has transitioned to a new phase and provides a reference for updated information on the corridor.

Ideally, a coordinated public involvement plan should be developed and implemented. The plan should identify roles and responsibilities and incorporate an agreed-upon methodology. The plan should be specific enough to understand which agencies are responsible for which activities but it should provide for flexibility in the event of unforeseen circumstances. It is critically important for these activities to occur in a timely manner. It is recognized that the IH 35 project development includes multiple agencies but overall, the process has been hampered by an excessive review process. As noted in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report, there is a disconnect between project development staff and the public information officers at the TxDOT district level. Perhaps having the district public information officer involved in the project development process could expedite much of review process.

Generally, the establishment of clear goals and performance measures for public engagement activities can help to focus limited resources. These goals and performance measures should be set and monitored as part of each public engagement plan or effort and throughout the process. The measures should demonstrate that all affected and interested parties are given an opportunity to provide input and that input is reflected in the project development. If adjustments are needed, they should be made early in the process. Many community meetings have already been conducted for the various corridors described above. These should continue to ensure that all perspectives are being addressed. Specific changes resulting from these meetings should be incorporated into project development and highlighted to demonstrate that opinions are being heard and heeded.
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS: DALLAS-FORT WORTH REGION

Introduction
Agencies in each of the state’s most congested regions conduct public engagement activities that vary in nature and scope. The following sections describe ongoing public engagement efforts known by the Rider 42 team for the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) region. Where applicable, the numbers in parenthesis indicate the rank of the congested corridor in the top 50.

At the regional level in Dallas-Fort Worth, a variety of entities are coordinating efforts to address congestion for this area’s most congested corridors. Most predominant among those planning and implementing transportation solutions are the following:

**North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG)**
http://www.nctcog.org/

**TxDOT Dallas and Fort Worth Districts**

**Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART)**
http://www.dart.org/

**Fort Worth Transportation Authority (The T)**
http://www.the-t.com/

**Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA)**
http://www.dcta.net/

**North Texas Tollway Authority (NTTA)**
https://www.ntta.org/Pages/default.aspx

Other agencies include counties, cities, other rural and medical transit providers, as well as other types of transportation operations such as rail and air. The list above denotes those most directly involved in the implementation of public engagement efforts for the MIP corridors.

Assessment of Regional Effort

- This section of the report evaluates the DFW region according to the following criteria:
  - Coordinates public engagement activities as part of a regional, programmatic approach.
  - Applies project-specific public engagement strategies.
  - Leverages next generation strategies.

**Criterion: Coordinate a Regional, Programmatic Approach**

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) maintains, as stated on its Web site, that “a proactive public participation process is vital to ensuring that the transportation planning process fosters meaningful involvement by all users of the system.” Consequently, the organization seeks to:
Proactively educate and engage area citizens in the transportation planning process.

Communicate the benefits of an efficient transportation system and how that system contributes to the region’s overall quality of life.

Specifically for transportation planning, NCTCOG identifies a Community Outreach Program Area, under which public engagement activities are staffed. Highlights on this group’s web page include public meeting videos, as well as a fact sheet series on regional mobility projects and programs. The organization’s public participation plan is intended to provide opportunities for early and continuing involvement, and strives to go beyond legal requirements to ensure that all residents have an opportunity to participate in decision-making. This program’s webpage is located at: http://www.nctcog.org/trans/programs/outreach.asp. Opportunities for public interaction include: email, mail, RSS feed, public meetings, interactive Web site form, and social media via Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

NCTCOG’s North Texas 2050 effort exemplifies a best of practice public engagement effort to arrive at a regional vision. The agency won the 2011 National Planning Excellence Award for Innovation in Sustaining Places from the American Planning Association for the North Texas 2050 visioning exercise and plan. As described on the North Texas 2050 web page, Vision North Texas held stakeholder workshops throughout the 16 counties of the North Texas region to arrive at a community vision for a future that is beyond “business as usual.” While it is unclear if the work plan and action items are continuing, the online work plan includes specific items and responsibilities by agencies in the area, and includes communications and briefing and presentation materials to continue to use into the future to communicate the challenges faced by the region, including transportation challenges. More information is available at: http://www.visionnorthtexas.org/main.html.

NCTCOG’s transportation home page includes additional coordinated public engagement efforts for specific transportation initiatives, including:

- Commute Smart - A tool to track money and miles saved by North Texans not using their single-occupancy vehicles, highlighting transit, bike, and walk options, as well as information for employers on how to promote smarter commuting. A new component is ride matching for carpools and vanpools. More information at: http://www.tryparkingit.com/.

- Go Green/Breathe Clean campaign - Winner of the Clean Air Excellence Award, this web page is hosted by NCTCOG and promotes initiatives to improve regional air quality. A current focus is Clean Air Action Day on June 21, 2013. Other efforts include promotion of walk and bicycle alternatives and providing other commute alternatives. More information is available at: http://www.airnorthtexas.org/.
NCTCOG and the TxDOT Dallas and Fort Worth Districts use a range of strategies to encourage public involvement in transportation planning. Those strategies include public meetings at various times and locations, web-based information, monthly and quarterly printed and electronic newsletters, news media relations, social media, and visualization tools. Specifically, as noted in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, TxDOT underscores the link between public support and project success in its general requirements for Programmatic Comprehensive Development Agreements (CDAs). The CDAs outline the expectations and requirements for developers who are directly responsible for designing and implementing a Public Information and Communication Plan. The requirements address:

- Qualifications and responsibilities of a project’s public information coordinator.
- Operational details of a public information office for the project.
- Segmenting of customer groups.
- Guidelines for public meetings and preparation of meeting minutes.
- Emergency event communications.
- Lane closures communications.
- Specific outreach tools and strategies, such as a Web site, newsletters, signage, brochures, etc.

The most active and robust public engagement efforts underway in the region are related to the IH 635 project in Dallas and the North Tarrant Express (NTE) project in Fort Worth. These efforts, together with the earlier DFW Connector project (not on the most congested corridors list) set the standard for public engagement efforts in the Dallas-Fort Worth region.

**Criterion: Application of Project-specific Public Engagement Strategies**

Individual projects by region and their associated public engagement strategies were summarized in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report. Here, each of the region’s corridors are re-examined with regard to currently planned outreach and communication efforts. Both project-specific public engagement plans and inclusion of specific public engagement activities as part of a scope of work for a contractor are considered.

Generally, the projects with ongoing studies offer web sites which provide timely information to at least a state-of-the-practice level. As noted above, several of the Dallas-Fort Worth projects exemplify best practice level public engagement efforts.

**IH 635 LBJ Freeway (#3)**

Overall, public involvement efforts for the IH 635 LBJ Freeway (#3) at this point in time are oriented toward construction-related efforts, because the project is under construction and the public involvement efforts related to project planning have been completed. Nonetheless, the LBJ Express Project, as it is known, still provides an example for other projects with regard to public information.
In this case, a notable aspect is the information that the Dallas District provides as part of its TxDOT studies page. The LBJ Express Project serves as a quality example. From the TxDOT Dallas District Studies web page, referenced above, the user is able to navigate to an explanatory page of information which provides a general overview of the project and project partnerships, including describing the CDA implementation aspect. This page is located at: http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/dallas/635-lbj-cda.html. Links are included which allow the user to then navigate to the project-specific web page maintained by the CDA partner, LBJ Infrastructure group for “up-to-date construction and lane closure information” at http://www.lbjexpress.com/. On this Web site, users can obtain information about ongoing outreach activities, including regularly scheduled morning coffee briefing sessions and the award-winning LBJ Marketplace effort. The LBJ Marketplace keeps corridor-area businesses engaged and supporting each other with business-to-business marketing, as well as marketing the businesses to the general public.

Other links are provided from this TxDOT page, as well, including other partners in the process and contact information at TxDOT. This web-page, proffered directly on the TxDOT Dallas District’s web page, is considered a best practice example of the overview context that TxDOT should provide as the owner-agency of a project along the most congested corridors, even in those cases such as the LBJ Express, which are being coordinated through a CDA or other partnership.

A review of the other studies included on the Dallas District’s Studies web page (http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/dallas.html) demonstrates a similar approach across all of the studies listed, which shows a clear consistency of information across projects, another best practice in public engagement called for earlier in this check-in document. Finally, the Dallas District provides for almost all of the studies the name of the TxDOT staff contact for each of the individual studies, a best practice which advances accountability and transparency with the public, besides facilitating communication.
North Tarrant Express (#14 and #8)
The North Tarrant Express project is designed to relieve congestion on IH 820 (North Loop) and SH 183/SH 121 (Airport Freeway). Construction is beginning along IH 35W (North Freeway) from downtown Fort Worth north toward Alliance Airport. Similar to the LBJ Express project above, a project information overview is provided on a project-specific page directly accessible from the TxDOT Fort Worth District studies web page, the project-specific page is located at: http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/fort-worth/north-tarrant-express.html. General project information, up-to-date activities, and contracting information regarding the implementation CDA are provided, as well as contact information for several individuals in charge of different aspects. Also similar to the above project, most of the public involvement activities associated with project planning have already occurred for the section under construction, Phase One, which encompasses the most congested corridor limits. As described above, TxDOT underscores the link between public support and project success in its general requirements for CDAs, resulting in a consistency of public engagement effort, including outlining expectations and requirements for developers who are directly responsible for designing and implementing a Public Information and Communication Plan.

The TxDOT Fort Worth District overview webpage includes a reference to a “Project Tracker” two-page document which summarizes the project, as well as to the project-specific webpage maintained under the CDA to provide to the public up-to-date construction-related information at: http://www.northtarrantexpress.com/. This Project Tracker document provides a mechanism for clear information for easy distribution to the public, a best practice.
IH 35 W North Freeway (#8)

According to the MIP corridor description (http://mobility.tamu.edu/mip/corridors-pdfs/dfw/DFW-IH-35-W-8-5.pdf), this corridor is the most congested corridor in Tarrant County, where Fort Worth is located. Construction on IH 35W from IH 820 north toward the US 287 (Decatur Cutoff) began in April 2013 and the segment from downtown Fort Worth north to and including the IH 820 interchange is expected to begin in the second half of 2013. The snapshot in time from the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement report documented public engagement efforts on IH 35 W beginning with a public meeting on the segment between IH 820 and US 287 in early 2012. On April 25, 2013, a public open house featured schematics and video animations of the project. Project staff was on hand to address questions related to construction phasing/timing, and design and aesthetics. Participating partners in the event include TxDOT, NTTA, the City of Fort Worth, Haltom City and Hurst, and area chambers.

Now that construction is under way in the north phase of the project, the public can sign up for e-alerts or check for lane closures at northtarrantexpress.com. TxDOT and NTE Mobility Partners3 hosted the project’s first Business Owner Task Force Meeting on June 12, which will be held quarterly or more frequently as the project advances. The TxDOT Fort Worth District again demonstrates exemplary...
performance in providing a project overview consistent with other studies’ information in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, including general information and history of efforts to improve this corridor. An additional notable information resource provided by the TxDOT district for public consumption is a tabloid-size summary map for IH 35 W, which summarizes studies and projects over time for this significant corridor. A snapshot of this map is provided to the right. The map itself can be accessed directly from the TxDOT Fort Worth District’s IH 35W Corridor web page, at:

The May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report also noted that IH 35 is encompassed under a separate, overarching effort for the IH 35 corridor through Texas, the My35 study. More information is available at: http://www.my35.org/. My35 is a citizen-led planning effort to find solutions for the IH 35 corridor from Gainesville to Laredo. The effort is overseen by a Corridor Advisory Committee. Four segment committees involve local decision-makers and the public in determining the best solutions for their communities. The My35 effort is highlighted as a best practice approach in the recommendations chapter below. In addition, TxDOT has recently established an Office of Public Strategies. One of the primary charges of this office is the coordination of the My35 planning effort. This work ranges from assisting district public information officers in project development to supporting construction activities with information and resources.

IH 35E Stemmons Freeway (#12 and #19)

At the time of the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, there was no Web site dedicated to planned improvements to the Stemmons Freeway, although the section of IH 35 from IH 635 south to Loop 12 was noted as being addressed on the Web sites dedicated to LBJ Freeway improvements. The TxDOT District provides overview information, as well as a contact name, for IH 35E at:
http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/dallas/i35e.html

The project information provided as part of the MIP study effort at the following two locations is also helpful in providing an overview of efforts to date:

As referenced by the MIP project information sheets, related projects include the LBJ Express (see #3 above) and the “Horseshoe Project,” which addresses mobility issues along IH 30 and IH 35E crossing the Trinity River near downtown Dallas’ Central Business District. More information at:

In addition, the TxDOT Dallas District and North Texas Strategic Projects Office have recently completed procurement for expansion of Interstate 35E from IH 635 in northern Dallas County to US 380 in Denton County, a project that includes the 28th and 70th most congested highway segments in Texas. This project has been formally awarded to the developer, who will adhere to previously established public engagement principles and requirements on earlier public-private partnership projects. This will include regular public, business and stakeholder briefings, a dedicated Web site with various informational tools, and a TxDOT-produced project overview sheet.
The IH 35E corridor has and continues to receive attention from a variety of efforts. According to the Web site www.keepitmovingdallas.com, a number of public hearings have discussed different segments along this corridor. Also available on the Web site are a fact sheet and brochure of project information and details. The public can submit questions or comments via the Web site. As described above, the My 35 Web site (http://www.my35.org) also provides an opportunity for the public to provide input for IH 35 generally.

As noted earlier in this report, as well as the May 2012 Public Engagement Report, there is a considerable likelihood that the public can be confused by the many efforts focused on IH 35. It is critically important that messaging related to the entire corridor be consistent throughout this critical statewide artery. Ideally, the information should be housed on one particular Web site with links to various project sites or districts for more information. The My35 Web site provides an appropriate venue.

SH 366 Woodall Rogers Freeway (#5)
Likewise for the Woodall Rogers Freeway, and as noted in the May 2012 report, there are no specific plans for future efforts beyond those discussed in the MIP project overview at:

Most recent public engagement efforts for this corridor addressed impacts from construction of the urban park, Klyde Warren Park, which was built on a deck above the main lanes of the freeway. This park project is in itself an effort garnering attention statewide; this construction effort was completed in 2012.

US 75 North Central Expressway
In May 2012, it was noted that there are no specific public engagement efforts in place for improvements to US 75. The Dallas District recently initiated its public engagement efforts toward a corridor study of US 75 from IH 635 to SH 121, with initial public meetings to be held in Dallas and Collin counties in mid-June, 2013. The MIP project overview is located at:

Lesson: Facilitating Decision-maker and Citizen Access to Specific Most-Congested Corridors
Generally, the TxDOT Dallas and Fort Worth Districts offer a great example for other TxDOT districts and agencies on providing a project-specific overview for each project under study, with general project information, description, and at least one contact name along with contact information regarding the project. This practice is generally consistent, regardless of whether the study or construction effort has a separate, project-specific web page hosted off the TxDOT web site. This represents best in practice by an owner-agency and is commendable.

A lesson learned is in the identification of projects that are listed on the most congested list, and for which there is no current project information or description on the District’s web pages. Because of their prominence and attention on the most congested list (and likelihood of that list continuing to call such attention), it is advisable that such a project description be added, even if the information provided is
that there are no current studies or construction efforts planned. References to other agencies and non-construction efforts (such as alternative modes or trip reduction efforts) are also useful additions to provide information. In addition, for a citizen user trying to identify the project information on the District’s web pages which is pertinent to the most congested corridors list, it would be helpful if the descriptions provided on each District’s main studies page included this most congested corridor designation. This would facilitate decision-maker and citizen accessing information about these highlighted corridors.

Criterion: Leverage Next Generation Strategies

As described above in the Austin region chapter, in many cases, the agencies have extensive information about a particular project or improvement, and yet this information is only reaching a small proportion of the people who may be affected by the project. As described in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, next generation strategies are an additional platform for increasing accessibility and engagement for all stakeholders. Alongside the above assessments, this check-in examines the level of effort that each corridor team and region have devoted to leveraging additional best practice strategies, as presented in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report.

Use of next generation strategies is incorporated as part of the assessment of application of the four best principles for successful public engagement, described previously:

1. Accessible events.
2. Engaging interactions.
4. An outcome-oriented process.

Successful incorporation of these advanced public engagement tools adds to the value of the decision-making. These tools are not meant to replace, but rather, augment traditional approaches. It is necessary for agencies to recognize the changing methods of communication and incorporate them into their public engagement plans.

DFW Connector Project: Setting the Bar for Early, Proactive Public Engagement

As described in the May 2012 report, the public engagement process for major roadway projects in the Dallas-Fort Worth region has evolved over time. TxDOT and its contractors were able to draw from lessons learned on the DFW Connector effort, a project not on the most congested corridor list, to enhance public engagement efforts for the LBJ Express (#3) and North Tarrant Express (#14 and #8) plans.

The DFW Connector public engagement effort involved a number of enhanced communication strategies, but perhaps the most important aspect relates to timing: in the case of the DFW Connector, outreach activities began well in advance of funding source determination. That early start, according to project team leaders, was central to the effort’s success in building public understanding and support in the early stages.
In addition to timing considerations, some of the more innovative and distinctive public engagement strategies for the DFW Connector project included:

- Specialized outreach activities, including branding and graphic design, Web site development, and targeted governmental relations.
- Business Owner Task Forces, through which business representatives are briefed on scheduled work in the vicinity of their properties.
- Specialized outreach training for engineering/technical staff members.
- More detailed segmenting of stakeholder and customer groups, e.g., community groups, schools and churches.
- More detail and greater specificity in task outlines for communication procedures.
- Greater emphasis on social media.
- A mobile application enabling commuters to receive lane closure information on their smart phones.
- Participation in community events.
- Updated traffic impact information for providers of in-vehicle navigation and mapping systems.
- Annual online surveys to gauge stakeholder and customer group opinions and feedback on the project.
- E-blasts and detour maps.

As an ongoing construction project, DFW Connector project information is maintained on the TxDOT Fort Worth District studies web page, including a project overview at: http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/fort-worth/dfw-connector.html. Likewise, a Project Tracker summary sheet is also available as a clear, consistent project overview item, recently updated in Spring 2013, at: http://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/ftw/connector_tracker.pdf, similar to the North Tarrant Express Project Tracker item shown above in Figure 2. Given the influence that the DFW Connector project has had on regional public engagement efforts, a more lengthy description of that early and proactive effort would be appropriate for inclusion and highlighting on the TxDOT Fort Worth’s study description page; such a description credits the agency for that effort, as well as demonstrates the District’s value on such public engagement efforts overall.

**Next Steps**

As described above, the Dallas-Fort Worth region demonstrates several Best Practice approaches toward public engagement. NCTCOG and the TxDOT Dallas and Fort Worth Districts appear to work well together to provide consistent messaging on the region’s challenges and ongoing studies and implementation efforts to address these challenges. NCTCOG is responsible for coordinating a regional vision and one effort in that direction, the North Texas 2050 effort, is an award-winning example; though it is unclear if specific actions under that effort continue. The two TxDOT districts provide an excellent example in many instances of providing a “Project Tracker” overview, for seven major projects: DFW Connector, LBJ Express, North Tarrant Express, Interstate 35W, State Highway 183, Interstate 35E (LBJ to US 380) and the Horseshoe project. Additional project overviews are in development for State Highway 360, the Loop 9 corridor and the Southern Gateway project (I-35E/US 67). These overviews provide key information, including project history and current project activities and links to outside
partnership activities, as well as a specific TxDOT staff contact by name for each study. In a few cases for corridors on the most congested corridors list, these descriptions were not found. Where practical, creation of project overview sheets for other projects is an opportunity for improvement.

Overall for the region, the highest bar set for Best Practice with regard to early, proactive public engagement is that of a project not on the most congested corridors list, the DFW Connector project, as described above. The public engagement efforts for the LBJ Express (#3) and North Tarrant Express (#14 and #8) were influenced by the DFW Connector successes, and yet public engagement efforts for those projects were begun only after funding for project improvements was identified. The employ of a mobility coordinator to help deliver information to groups such as homeowners associations, business and other civic groups did help this effort. As studies move forward on others of the most congested corridors, the DFW Connector study example may be helpful, as well as guidelines and suggestions made in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report. Also of note, the Project Tracker summary tool, as described for the North Tarrant Express project and shown in Figure 2, embodies the call made by the MIP study generally for clear, consistent project information.

For IH 35 specifically, as a corridor making the most congested list in other regions in Texas as well, it is critical that these agencies continue to coordinate public engagement activities from previous and ongoing efforts, including the My35 effort encompassing IH 35 statewide. The Dallas and Fort Worth Districts have held several planning sessions with the new Office of Public Strategies and the Office of Public Involvement to further enhance coordination and communication to the public. Regular discussions among those entities will continue to help refine roles and responsibilities and identify coordination and information needs of each district and office, all with the goal of benefitting the traveling public.

Generally, the establishment of clear goals and performance measures for public engagement activities can help to focus limited resources. These goals and performance measures should be set and monitored as part of each public engagement plan or effort and throughout the process. The measures should demonstrate that all affected and interested parties are given an opportunity to provide input and that input is reflected in the project development. If adjustments are needed, they should be made early in the process. Many community meetings have already been conducted for the various corridors described above. These should continue to ensure that all perspectives are being addressed. Specific changes resulting from these meetings should be incorporated into project development and highlighted to demonstrate that opinions are being heard and heeded.
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS: HOUSTON REGION

Introduction
Agencies in each of the state’s most congested regions conduct public engagement activities that vary in nature and scope. The following sections describe ongoing public engagement efforts known by the Rider 42 team for the Houston region. Where applicable, the numbers in parenthesis indicate the rank of the congested corridor in the top 50.

At the regional level in Houston, a variety of entities are coordinating efforts to address congestion for this area’s most congested corridors. Most predominant among those planning and implementing transportation solutions are the following:

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC)

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Houston District
http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/district/houston.html

Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO)
http://www.ridemetro.org/

Harris County Toll Road Authority
https://www.hctra.org/

Other agencies include counties, other cities, other transit providers, as well as other types of transportation operations such as rail and air. The list above denotes those most directly involved in the implementation of public engagement efforts for the MIP corridors.

Assessment of Regional Effort
This section of the report evaluates the region according to the following criteria:

- Coordinates public engagement activities as part of a regional, programmatic approach.
- Applies project-specific public engagement strategies.
- Leverages next generation strategies.

Criterion: Coordinate a Regional, Programmatic Approach

Formal public engagement coordination for the Houston Region on the overall regional transportation vision for the community is primarily conducted by H-GAC, as the transportation MPO and coordinator for regional transportation projects. Under the Transportation & Air Quality section of the H-GAC Web site, there is a specific section devoted to Public Engagement at: http://www.h-gac.com/taq/public_info/default.aspx. At the time of the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement report, H-GAC was operating under a public participation plan adopted in 2007.

H-GAC’s PPP document itself starts out with an engaging cover, as shown to the right. The plan includes H-GAC’s goals for public participation as part of its planning process for regional transportation plans and programs. Goals and objectives address these areas:

- Adequate public notice of public participation activities.
- Open and accessible public comment process.
- Visualization techniques.
- Accessibility across a broad platform of formats—electronic, media and languages.
- Public meetings in convenient and accessible locations and times.
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received for the Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program (two federally-required MPO efforts), and follow-up if necessary.
- Seek out and consider the needs of communities traditionally underserved by transportation.
- Periodic self-review of PPP effectiveness.

The H-GAC PPP meets the guidelines suggested by the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report for regional perspective and specific strategies. In addition, the H-GAC web site itself provides evidence of H-GAC public information practices, including regional perspective, a Brown Bag Lunch Series with current events scheduled, Public Information Archive, Media Information page, and active and ongoing public comment opportunities. Staff contact information for the Manager of Public Outreach is conveniently provided on every page of H-GAC’s Public Engagement section. Facebook and RSS feeds for the overall H-GAC web site are examples of next generation strategy application.

H-GAC’s Public Engagement Archives present an effective example of providing a record of public information and public comment opportunities. It is located at: http://www.h-gac.com/tag/public_info/archive-comments.aspx.

Examples of additional coordinated public engagement efforts for specific initiatives in the region include the following:

- METRO HOT Lanes. Highlighted on METRO’s web page, High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes are featured as a “new option” for commuting. As described, METRO has adapted existing HOV lanes to provide the opportunity for people driving alone in their cars to use the HOV lanes by paying a toll. More information at: http://www.ridemetro.org/Services/HOTLanes.aspx.

Various projects obviously involve specific public engagement efforts and coordination among the agencies involved. Other agencies in the area provide notable examples of project study listings for their respective agencies, including:
Harris County Toll Road Authority’s major projects listed at: [https://www.hctra.org/about_construction/](https://www.hctra.org/about_construction/). HCTRA’s project listing summary includes the project name, brief description, link to more information, as well as a general status of the project in terms of “Under Construction,” “In Design,” “In Planning,” etc. This approach is a positive model for an owner-agency to provide an overview of active and ongoing studies for public consumption.


**Criterion: Application of Project-specific Public Engagement Strategies**

Individual projects by region and their associated public engagement strategies were summarized in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report. Here, each of the Houston region’s corridors are re-examined with regard to currently planned outreach and communication efforts. Both project-specific public engagement plans and inclusion of specific public engagement activities as part of a scope of work for a contractor are considered.

Generally, the projects with ongoing studies offer Web sites, which provide timely information on a state-of-the-practice level.

**IH 45 North—Beltway 8 North to IH 610 (#1 and #7)**  
**US 59 Southwest—IH 610 West to SH 288 (#2)**  
**IH 45 Gulf—IH 10 to IH 610 South (#6)**

The above congested segments fall under the project development effort known as the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP), project web page located at: [http://www.ih45northandmore.com/](http://www.ih45northandmore.com/). The project web page is state-of-practice. New items are highlighted with a flashing .

The NHHIP involves the evaluation of IH 45 North from the US 59/SH 288 interchange to Beltway 8 North, the Hardy Toll Road from IH 610 North Loop to Beltway 8 North, and portions of IH 10, US 59 and SH 288 near downtown. Efforts as described in the earlier MIP Public Engagement report were traditional TxDOT public engagement practice, including a standard Open House format for initial public meetings in 2011 on project purpose and need and the proposed public involvement plan. Since that time, the Agency Coordination and Public Involvement Plan was updated in May 2012 and approved by FHWA in July 2012, document located at: [http://www.ih45northandmore.com/docs/NHHIP_ACPIP_8-24-12.pdf](http://www.ih45northandmore.com/docs/NHHIP_ACPIP_8-24-12.pdf). The document itself represents state of practice approaches and appears to describe state of practice public meetings and workshops.
continuing through 2013, with a Public Hearing on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement to be held in 2014. There is no evidence that earlier suggestions made in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report for this project have been incorporated, except for new additions to the project web site. Public involvement goals as described include providing “proactive public involvement” that includes “complete information, timely public notice and access to key decisions, and that supports early and continuing involvement in the study process” (p. 12). Objectives toward these goals include:

- Media and public communications.
- Frequent opportunities for public input.
- Inclusion of minority individuals and others with special needs, including specifically that public meeting handouts be provided in Spanish and meeting locations be accessible to persons with disabilities.
- All who wish to have input and that all ideas be given fair consideration.
- Public involvement as a learning process for both the public and project team members.
- Visually informative materials.
- Consider and respond to public input received.

Specific strategies include:

- Presentations to stakeholder groups upon request.
- Periodic newsletters.
- E-mail distribution list.
- Media releases.
- Public official email notifications.
- Glossary of common terms, available at public meetings and workshops.


Making this reference available to citizens accessing the project’s web site is a helpful feature for citizens otherwise unfamiliar with the NEPA process.

Lesson: Avoid Large Documents Where Possible for Public Accessibility

Of the above documents supporting the NHHIP study and linked on the project-specific web page, the Agency Coordination and Public Involvement Plan is over 7 MG in size, and the 2005 North-Hardy Planning Studies report is over 30 MG in size. Sometimes larger document sizes are unavoidable. Larger file sizes are prohibitive for download via some connections and may present storage issues for citizens, as well. There are techniques to make such files more user-friendly, including reducing the file size directly and breaking down the file into parts.
This segment of congested roadway is included in the My290 public involvement and communications effort that has been ongoing since October 2006. Considerable resources are dedicated to this planning effort, including a district public information staff person working exclusively on this project and dedicated resources via the TxDOT US 290 program management consultant contract. A comprehensive Web site has been developed and is available at www.my290.com.

The attractive and reasonably dynamic Web site presentation includes a project-specific logo, as well as a Get Involved link. This link provides four additional links: Objectives, Request an Appointment, Email Updates and Twitter. The objectives as provided following the above link are fairly broad:

| The goals of the US 290 Program Team are to improve your commute and to better the community’s future. |
| In order to consistently meet these goals throughout the life of the program, we are committed to upholding three keys to success: |
|   - Commitment. |
|   - Concern. |
|   - Care. |
| This means that in all we do, we show: |
|   - Commitment to improving your commute. |
|   - Concern for your community. |
|   - Care for your quality of life. |

Under Contacts, two individuals are identified, one with TxDOT. The Web site describes an ambitious plan of reconstruction and new construction, including accelerated elements, some of which are already underway under the effort described below.

Public meetings are found under the tab “Environmental,” which is not necessarily an intuitive location for a citizen unfamiliar with the NEPA process. On this page, located at http://www.my290.com/environmental.html, two public meetings held in December 2012 are described. These meetings introduced the public to what is called the interim project, a partnership between TxDOT and the Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA) “which will greatly accelerate US 290 Program construction.” A further link provides information (presentation, typical sections, and posters) from the public meeting at: http://www.my290.com/environmental/86-get-involved/122-public-meeting-information.html. The posters from the public meeting do exemplify the use of eye-catching and engaging graphics, especially the graphic used to summarize the NEPA process for the US 290 Corridor Project and the purpose of the December 2012 meetings being an FEIS re-evaluation. The project team used changeable message signs along the roadway to advertise the December meetings. This is an innovative approach in an effort to reach people not on the traditional notification system. The meetings were well attended and meeting participants even tweeted about it. This project benefits from the years of previous outreach efforts. In most instances, people are supportive of the project.
even if they might have individual issues for the project team to address. The project team does an exemplary job of keeping people informed of lane/ramp closures and proactively engages residents and business that will soon be impacted by construction activities.

Figure 3. US 290 Managed Lanes Schedule (including accelerated elements).

Figure 4. NEPA Process Poster for the US 290 Corridor Project.
As noted in the March 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, only the home page can be translated into Spanish using the “Espanol” link at the upper right of the web page. Other pages, when “Espanol” is chosen, either revert to the home page in Spanish, or include this direction:

Si necesite respuestas a sus preguntas en el espanol, o necesite alguien traducir esta informacion, contacte Mike Zientek a mzientek@hntb.com o llamelo al (713) 354-1556.

Overall, the Web site, which was being revamped in Spring 2012, is attractive and informative about the interim project. Several state-of-the-practice opportunities are available for the public to provide input. The webpage overall exhibits more “push” of information than “pull” soliciting and sharing feedback received for community discussion, however. For example, there is not clear reference to how any input received to date has informed and changed any aspect of project direction. At a minimum, sharing the comments received to date would demonstrate a commendable level of transparency.

The staff of the US 290 reconstruction project uses Web site and e-mail resources to communicate daily lane closure and detour information to commuters traveling on and along the 290 corridor. Currently, this information is provided only in text form, but work has begun to enhance the visual and information content of both the Web site and e-mail alerts to illustrate the closures and detours in a clearer and more easily-understood manner. Both efforts will focus on providing specific information on closure conditions from the existing district database, supplemented with graphics and visual references, appropriate to the information medium.

Previous work efforts on the I-35 Central Texas corridor by Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) produced a system of e-mail alerts from a common lane closure database. Vetted with the public through traveler information surveys as well as an email correspondence address, the visually striking and color-coded lane closure notification emails have proven to be an easily understood and highly effective method of communicating closure information to drivers. Survey responses indicate a satisfaction rate of greater than 95 percent. The proposal is to apply those resources to the 290 widening project and capitalize on existing work with proven effectiveness. The overall cost for this component is reduced as the Houston district already utilizes a similar lane closure database that will be the information source.

Periodic review of the information design and site navigation of a project Web site is essential to its ongoing effectiveness. This is certainly true of long-term highway construction Web sites, given that such projects move through phases of varying length that impact the public in different ways. From an early emphasis on financing details and long-term benefits, such sites should evolve to focus on operational details down to upcoming lane closures and exit ramp changes. TTI staff will conduct a review of the current 290 site organization as it relates to the current status of the project, and assist with modifications that will make the site more effective for its many users.

A project office, located at US 290 and IH 610, also serves as a community resource where individuals may stop in to get information and ask questions. In addition, interested parties can sign up to receive e-mail updates or make a request for a presentation. Project updates are sent via e-mail and news feeds to a database of over 1800 stakeholders. The project also makes use of social media via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The project office is a nice concept to improve accessibility for local stakeholders.
The hours are not posted, however, and the appointment feature on the web site suggests that an appointment is necessary.

Following a successful strategy in the Dallas-Fort Worth region for the DFW Connector, the project team plans to implement monthly meetings with business owners in the corridor. The meetings will help business owners understand the construction process, lane/ramp closures and how to communicate detour routes.

**Lesson: Make Public Meeting and Input Opportunities Easy to Find on Web sites**

As noted above for one of the project examples, the public meetings information was provided under an “Environmental” tab. This example demonstrates the value of soliciting feedback from users unfamiliar with the transportation planning process on how communicative a web site is from a general citizen’s perspective. Generally, public engagement activities should be highlighted as such.

**Criterion: Leverage Next Generation Strategies**

As described above for the previous regions, in many cases, the agencies have extensive information about a particular project or improvement, and yet this information is only reaching a small proportion of the people who may be affected by the project. As described in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, next generation strategies are an additional platform for increasing accessibility and engagement for all stakeholders. Alongside the above assessments, this check-in examines the level of effort that each corridor team and region have devoted to leveraging additional best practice strategies, as presented in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report.

Use of next generation strategies is incorporated as part of the assessment of application of the four best principles for successful public engagement, described previously:

1. Accessible events.
2. Engaging interactions.
4. An outcome-oriented process.

Successful incorporation of these advanced public engagement tools added to the value of the decision-making. These tools are not meant to replace, but rather, augment traditional approaches. It is necessary for agencies to recognize the changing methods of communication and incorporate them into their public engagement plans.

Within this general context, then, the Houston region is clearly utilizing some next generation strategies. The H-GAC Public Participation Plan (PPP), as described above for the region’s programmatic approach, commits to accessibility across a broad platform of formats—electronic, media and languages; in addition, public meetings will be held in convenient and accessible locations and times. Outcome-orientation is more difficult to quantify, and yet the H-GAC commits to perform periodic self-review of PPP effectiveness, which could incorporate consideration of outcomes from their public engagement process.
Web-based communication, especially project-specific Web sites, demonstrates an additional platform in use by regional agencies. An engaging web page is even better, and the US 290 web page reasonably qualifies at www.my290.com. The US 290 meetings, described above, demonstrated an engaging use of meeting graphics, also shown in several figures above.

**Next Steps**

During the initial assessment for the congested Texas corridors project, a common theme stakeholders voiced was the need for more proactive public engagement. The efforts described above meet state of practice public engagement needs, but do not offer many best practice examples. Overall, the H-GAC regional efforts appear to be the most advanced. H-GAC’s planning process involves a prescribed public involvement process, but also one that is deliberately engaging and accessible across multiple platforms. Project-specific examples by specific agencies above offer some opportunities for improvement. The consensus as described in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report was that more could be done if additional resources were available.

Another concern that was expressed in the previous report was the lack of coordination within TxDOT:

- In most instances, the TxDOT public information staff is not part of the project development process and is only engaged during project construction. If TxDOT could engage in more focused outreach during the project development process, many issues might be addressed before costly change orders are incurred. Earlier engagement could also help minimize or prevent public criticism and opposition.
- The agency should make a concerted effort to make people aware of how to comment on a project earlier in project development.

It is unclear that this area of concern has been addressed.
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS: SAN ANTONIO REGION

Introduction

Agencies in each of the state’s most congested regions conduct public engagement activities that vary in nature and scope. The following sections describe ongoing public engagement efforts known by the Rider 42 team for the San Antonio region. Where applicable, the numbers in parenthesis indicate the rank of the congested corridor in the top 50.

At the regional level in San Antonio, a variety of entities are coordinating efforts to address congestion for this area’s most congested corridors according to Rider 42. Most predominant among those planning and implementing transportation solutions are those put forth by the following lead transportation agencies in the region:

San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (SA-BC MPO)
http://www.sametroplan.org/

TxDOT San Antonio District

Vía Metropolitan Transit (Via)
http://www.viainfo.net/

City of San Antonio (Department of Public Works)
http://www.sanantonio.gov/publicworks/

Bexar County
http://www.bexar.org/index.html

Alamo RMA
https://www.notta.org/Pages/default.aspx

Other agencies include other counties and cities in the region, other transit providers, as well as other types of transportation operations such as rail and air. The list above denotes those most directly involved in the implementation of public engagement efforts for the MIP corridors.

- Other efforts which are related to congestion relief in the San Antonio region include:
  - TransGuide Monitoring. TransGuide is a traffic management center operated by TxDOT San Antonio, using video cameras and dynamic message signs to facilitate mobility on strategic freeway corridors, including IH 35 through the San Antonio downtown area.
  - Incident Management. There is local agency agreement and support to improve incident management to reduce incident-related congestion.
  - Travel Demand Management. Similarly, local agencies are increasingly agreeing that the region would benefit from travel demand management strategies, including the formation of one or several Transportation Management Associations in cooperation with major employers. A MIP-funded study on travel demand management is slated to begin in spring of 2013.
Parking Management. Especially for the urban core, local agencies have identified parking management as a potential high-return strategy for reducing congestion. MIP is funding an additional study of this strategy for the San Antonio region, as well, to be underway by the spring of 2013.

Assessment of Regional Effort
This section of the report evaluates the San Antonio region according to the following criteria:

- Coordinates public engagement activities as part of a regional, programmatic approach.
- Applies project-specific public engagement strategies.
- Leverages next generation strategies.

Criterion: Coordinate a Regional, Programmatic Approach

The San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization (SA-BC MPO) serves as the organization forwarding the metropolitan area’s vision. SA-BC MPO provides its public involvement information under a tab from its home page called “Get Involved,” located at: http://www.sametroplan.org/PI/pi.html. The federally required Public Involvement Plan is accessible under the Public Involvement Policy tab, and this document is also provided in Spanish. Several other items on this page are also explicitly identified as being available in Spanish, including brochures on Title VI, Limited English Proficiency and Environmental Justice. The remainder of the text items are translatable to Spanish using Google Translate, as described below.

Generally, the SA-BC MPO’s core values for the public participation process are listed as:

- Everybody should have a say in transportation decisions that affect their lives.
- The process should strive to reflect the interests and meet the process needs of participants.
- The process will actively seek out and facilitate the participation of all those potentially affected.
- The process will provide individuals with various choices in how they wish to participate.
- The process will provide usable information to permit the public’s participation in a meaningful manner.

Specifically for transportation planning activities, the MPO maintains a calendar of MPO events, provides a speaker to stakeholder groups by appointment, and features a web page of subject-specific videos on various topics, including Air Quality, Share the Road and the TIP program. In addition, the MPO uses a number of progressive outreach techniques to make citizens aware of engagement opportunities including Facebook, video public service announcements, bus cards, and television and radio public affairs shows to notify interested parties. MPO staff regularly exhibit tables at non-transportation-related activities such as health fairs and
environmental events to reach a broader audience. The SA-BC MPO is using a variety of platforms to reach varied audiences, which is a best of practice approach.

SA-BC MPO’s home page includes several additional public engagement efforts, including:

- **V!News** – This monthly 1.5 minute video, accessible directly from the home page, features SA-BC MPO’s Senior Public Involvement Coordinator serving as the anchor. He welcomes viewers to this month’s V!News segment and then walks through a calendar highlighting upcoming MPO events. He concludes with “As always, here at the San Antonio-Bexar County MPO, We Plan to Keep You Moving.” This feature provides a welcoming and complementary media type to others on the web page and may improve accessibility for sight-impaired audiences. A version in Spanish is not immediately apparent, but would be a nice addition. Access the video by tapping on the V!News icon on the front page of the MPO’s web site at: [http://www.sametroplan.org/](http://www.sametroplan.org/).

- **Spotlight on Mobility** – This is an MPO quarterly newsletter provided in English and Spanish to highlight ongoing MPO and local transportation activities. The size is 17 MB, which does take a little time to download, but this 8-page newsletter is engaging and informative. Current newsletter at: [http://www.sametroplan.org/News/Spotlight/spotlight_english.pdf](http://www.sametroplan.org/News/Spotlight/spotlight_english.pdf).

- **Guide to Transportation Planning** – This is an engagingly formatted 31-page PDF, highlighted in Figure 5, that walks the viewer through the transportation planning process specifically for San Antonio, including MPO factors, how the process works, eligible roads, funding, etc. It includes a video introduction accessible from the Introduction page, which is a nice feature but it is a little hidden from new users since it is not located on the MPO’s main page. It is unclear if a Spanish version is available. ([http://www.sametroplan.org/News/CitizensGuide/scrabble_Final.pdf](http://www.sametroplan.org/News/CitizensGuide/scrabble_Final.pdf).

- **Walkable Community Program** – This effort is explicitly described as a program recognizing the need to plan for “everyone and all modes of travel.” Goals are education, identification of infrastructure improvements that will encourage active transportation, and providing a two-way communication venue between the community and the MPO and local transportation partners. More information at: [http://www.sametroplan.org/WCP/WCP.html](http://www.sametroplan.org/WCP/WCP.html).

- **MPO Acronyms List** – with a “Confused by the Lingo?” tagline, this is a quick reference guide to commonly used MPO acronyms with definitions. A helpful touch, perhaps a more prominent location would be helpful for new users. List is located at: [http://www.sametroplan.org/Committees/TPB/docs/MPO_Acronyms.pdf](http://www.sametroplan.org/Committees/TPB/docs/MPO_Acronyms.pdf).

- **iMAP Transportation Viewer** – shown in Figure 6, iMap is an interactive mapping application to support the multi-modal transportation system. Layers include traffic counts, crash data by mode including non-motorized travel, transit and bicycle routes, future congestion forecasts, road ownership and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as well as Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) projects. More information is available at: [http://www.sametroplan.org/imap/index.html](http://www.sametroplan.org/imap/index.html).
Figure 5. SA-BC MPO Guide to Transportation Planning.

Figure 6. SA-BC MPO Map Viewer.
For the corridors on the most congested list, the TxDOT San Antonio District and the Alamo Regional Mobility Authority (Alamo RMA) appear to be the lead agencies with regard to public engagement in the project development process. In addition, a substantial outreach effort informing travelers of additional travel options is generally desirable to address mobility region wide. VIA’s Web site SmartWaySA includes information about the process to develop VIA’s Long Range Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2035). The Web site includes YouTube videos, an option to sign up to receive the latest updates, newsletters and meeting notices, and a form to submit comments online. There is also a link to a Facebook page. The initial MIP Engagement Report had identified this web page as one medium for continued public outreach activities. However, the Web site does not appear to have been updated since the July 2011 adoption of the plan by the VIA board (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. VIA SmartWaySA Web Page.

Lesson: Reaching Spanish Speakers Involves High Tech and Low Tech

On all pages of the SA-BC MPO Web page, Spanish translation is introduced via a small-text tag in the upper right of the Web page “Traducir al español.” The user is directed to utilize Google language tools, a free translation service, and reminded that computerized translation is not context sensitive, so that the MPO does not guarantee the accuracy of the converted text. A contact phone number is provided in case the user has any questions. After clicking “Entiendo” (I understand) the Web site is translated to Spanish. Much of the site is translated, but items such as PDF documents, videos and calendar items are
not. As noted above, a few PDF items on the Public Involvement page are explicitly translated to Spanish, however the MPO’s plan documents are not. A random choice of one sub tab “MPO Policies” also yielded the error message “The page you requested was too large to translate.” Overall, this translation feature is a step in the right direction and does serve many languages beyond Spanish. Yet, given the region’s representation of Spanish-only and Spanish-preference speakers, it does appear that this aspect is not fully evolved. One intermediate step that could be taken is to provide an Executive Summary of the longer plan documents available in both English and Spanish. Of course, a critical low tech approach is ensuring that study teams include bilingual Spanish speakers, at least as translators, ideally as technical professionals involved directly with the project development process themselves.

**Criterion: Application of Project-specific Public Engagement Strategies**

Individual projects by region and their associated public engagement strategies were summarized in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report. Here, each of the region’s corridors are re-examined with regard to currently planned outreach and communication efforts. Both project-specific public engagement plans and inclusion of specific public engagement activities as part of a scope of work for a contractor are considered.

Generally, the projects with ongoing studies offer Web sites, which provide timely information to at least a state-of-the-practice level. As noted below, several of the San Antonio projects exemplify best practice level public engagement efforts.

**Loop 1604—SH 16 (Bandera Road) to FM 471 (#23)**

As described previously, the Alamo RMA and the TxDOT San Antonio District have studied various configurations for improvement to this congested roadway. In recent years, a Super Street project was completed to improve operations and safety in the near term. The Alamo RMA led the Super Street project in conjunction with other transportation partners including TxDOT, the MPO and Bexar County. This effort was divided into three distinct projects for environmental clearance purposes. As part of that effort, several community meetings were held, including an open house/public meeting on May 25, 2010. The open house included a guide and description of the various potential improvement schematic drawings. The meeting information also included explanations of the Super Street concept and how it might improve conditions in the short term. The information provided showed that this effort was an interim improvement while a larger Loop 1604 EIS study is underway.

The Alamo RMA provides a direct link to the “More for 1604” Web site. This site, last updated in March 2011, is intended to provide support for public engagement efforts for the EIS for the 35 miles of Loop 1604 from US 90 in southwest San Antonio to IH 35 in northeast San Antonio, encompassing and extending beyond the limits of the most congested corridor segment. The EIS site is attractive and informative, with a dynamic ribbon changing pictures from along the corridor across the top. Options to get information or provide input include participation in a Community Advisory Group, eNewsletter, project-specific hotline, blog, group presentation, mailing list, and online comment submittal.

Unfortunately, as shown in Figure 8 and referenced on the Loop 1604 EIS page on the Alamo RMA’s web site, the EIS was anticipated to be completed in mid-2012. These resources do not appear to have been
updated for some time, so it is unclear what the status is of Loop 1604 EIS. More information is available at: http://www.alamorma.org/index.cfm/projects/loop-1604-eis/.

For the specific most congested segment of SH 16 (Bandera Road) to FM 471 (Culebra Road), it appears on the TxDOT San Antonio District Project Studies web page that bids are being taken for construction to replace the interim super street configuration with an expressway section (main lanes and frontage roads), all within existing right of way and with environmental clearance. On the TxDOT San Antonio District Project Studies webpage, this project appears to be listed twice:

- One listing provides general project information and appears to be oriented toward procurement of a contractor for construction, at: http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/san-antonio/loop1604.html.

- The other listing is brief, but includes a TxDOT staff contact name, schematic and public meeting presentation from January 2013. This January 2013 presentation includes a FAQ slide which references the above Alamo RMA EIS, with the question (FAQ) being how the two efforts are related. The slide makes a point that the two efforts are unrelated: the EIS is being conducted by Alamo RMA and the expressway project segment is being funded with traditional funding. More information is available at: http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/san-antonio/loop1604-northwest.html.

The TxDOT San Antonio District Project Studies web page also includes a listing for a project to grade-separate Loop 1604 at Marbach Road, which is also within the area encompassed by the Alamo RMA EIS. From the information provided, the construction should be complete at this time and the public meeting information provided is still on the District Web site for reference only. Information is available at: http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/san-antonio/1604-marbach.html.

Unfortunately, one conclusion that could be drawn from the information in these web pages described above is that the planning efforts for Loop 1604 are fractured along multiple facets: between these two regional entities of the TxDOT San Antonio District and the RMA; between short- (super-street), interim (expressway), and long-term (EIS study conclusions), even along the segments of Loop 1604. This is very confusing for the general public. A succinct infographic could accurately display this information in an easy-to-understand format.
US 281—Loop 1604 to Comal County Line (#38)

The Alamo RMA and TxDOT completed a Super Street project on US 281 in 2010, similar to that completed on Loop 1604. In fact, the US 281 Super Street was the first of its kind in Texas. The Alamo RMA provided extensive information about the interim solution on a dedicated Web site about the project (see Figure 9) and described what to expect as a result of the project. The public engagement effort, described in more detail in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, was considered progressive and successful. Currently, the project is also described more briefly, including updated information on the completion of construction, on the Alamo RMA project web page, provided at: http://www.alamorma.org/index.cfm/projects/us-281-super-street. This super street-dedicated web page would benefit from a front page notice that the effort is complete and a link to the up-to-date Alamo RMA project web page.
The above Web site materials, including the “What’s New!” materials section have apparently been folded into the Web site now active in support of the EIS effort to examine a longer term solution for this section of US 281. It appears that much of the information is common between the dedicated super street webpage (Figure 9) and the EIS web page, shown in Figure 10. This is confusing. As noted above, it would be helpful if the super street-dedicated web page were updated with a front page notice that the effort is complete and a link to the up-to-date Alamo RMA project web page and the new EIS web page.

For the EIS web page itself, according to the Alamo RMA projects web page on the US 281 EIS, the EIS was anticipated to be completed in mid-2012. However, the most recent information from the project specific web page appears to be January 2012, when there were still ongoing activities. The Alamo RMA projects web page for the US 281 EIS is located at: http://www.alamorma.org/index.cfm/projects/us-281-eis/. Therefore, it is also recommended that this EIS Web page be updated. Consideration should be paid to whether all of the material currently in common to both the superstreet and EIS web pages is indeed, common to both. If so, a clarification perhaps using an infographic regarding the timing of each of the studies and the meetings being reported as part of both studies would be helpful.
As noted in the previous MIP Public Engagement report, the activities of this endeavor are ambitious with respect to public engagement. Social media is utilized, despite the disclaimer on its use. Other opportunities for comment include online submission, e-mail list and event calendar. Google translation is provided (choice at top), which, as noted previously, is a step forward. However, it does not appear that many of the informational items provided on the web site are provided in Spanish, and there is no other indication that requests for information in Spanish are welcome.

IH 35—Loop 353 to US 281 (#48)

There is no outreach specifically targeted to this congested corridor in the core of San Antonio. However, several projects are planned in the near future for congestion mitigation in this corridor. In addition, the region wide efforts described at the beginning of this chapter (TDM, parking management, incident management, etc.) are related, as well. TxDOT has also recently launched a Central Planning and Linkages (PEL) study and an IH 35 Bypass PEL study, both of which were identified in the MIP process. These studies have the goal of identifying improvements that will mitigate congestion on the IH 35 corridor. These will include outreach to the community. In addition, in the next few years, VIA Metropolitan Transit has plans to complete a transit center west of downtown, with an associated street
car system into downtown. This effort, in conjunction with the planned bus rapid transit project on Fredericksburg Road, may lead to congestion mitigation in the congested corridor.

The statewide My35 planning effort, described in more detail in the next chapter, had an award-winning public involvement component. It resulted in a plan that reflects the interests and concerns of citizens through local and regional recommendations for meeting the mobility needs along Texas’ IH 35 corridor. The recommendations are documented in the August 2011 IH 35 Corridor Advisory Committee Plan, which should be considered, as individual segment lengths such as this one, are examined in more detail.

The Alamo RMA and TxDOT recently completed the “Time for 35” program, which is a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study for IH 35. Efforts such as this are a direct result of the recommendations from the My35 effort. The program involved community discussion and visions for long-term improvements in the IH 35 corridor from FM 1103 into downtown San Antonio. The joint effort incorporated social media, a web presence, traditional media outreach, constant contact e-newsletters, a technical advisory committee and a community advisory committee into the long-term outreach effort. Meeting information for the most recent public meetings on October 9 and 10, 2012, is posted, and includes Spanish handouts and comment cards in addition to English versions. Comments for the record could be submitted until October 24, 2012, via mail, e-mail, and fax. It is unclear if there have been more recent activities since that time.


**IH 35—FM 1518 to Loop 1604 (#49)**

For this section of the IH 35 corridor, just outside of Loop 1604 in the northeast quadrant of the San Antonio metropolitan area, current outreach efforts are related to a short-term congestion mitigation improvement. Identified as “IH 35 Selma” in the TxDOT San Antonio District Project Studies web page, the information provided includes staff contact names, as well as a brief description of the 18-month project begun in October 2012 to build auxiliary lanes and make other operational improvements. A “Fact Sheet” is provided as one link with “quick facts” about the project and contact information to the TxDOT Public Information Officer. More information is available at: http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects/studies/san-antonio/ih35-us281.html. The fact sheet can be viewed at: http://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/sat/ih35/fact_sheet.pdf.

As noted above for the previous IH 35 corridor section, the My35 and Time for 35 PEL studies for IH 35 should inform future improvements along IH 35 through the San Antonio region.
**FM 3487—SH 471 to IH 410 (#50)**

Also known as Culebra Road, this section, formerly a 4-lane arterial with center left turn lane, was improved to a 6-lane road with a center turn lane in 2010 and 2011. This information is provided on the MIP project summary page, located at: [http://mobility.tamu.edu/mip/corridors-pdfs/sanantonio/SA-FM-3487-50-Nov_2012_sv.pdf](http://mobility.tamu.edu/mip/corridors-pdfs/sanantonio/SA-FM-3487-50-Nov_2012_sv.pdf). No references to current planning efforts for additional projects were found.

**Criterion: Leverage Next Generation Strategies**

As described for the previous sections, the San Antonio agencies generally have extensive information about a particular project or improvement. As described in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, next generation strategies are an additional platform for increasing accessibility and engagement for all stakeholders. Alongside the above assessments, this check-in examines the level of effort that each corridor team and region have devoted to leveraging additional best practice strategies, as presented in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report.

Use of next generation strategies is incorporated as part of the assessment of application of the four best principles for successful public engagement, described previously:

- Accessible events.
- Engaging interactions.
- Multi-platform strategies.
- An outcome-oriented process.

Successful incorporation of these advanced public engagement tools added to the value of the decision-making process. These tools are not meant to replace, but rather, augment traditional approaches. It is necessary for agencies to recognize the changing methods of communication and incorporate them into their public engagement plans.

As should be clear from the descriptions above, various projects in the San Antonio region demonstrate application of next generation strategies. Areas for improvement include follow-through, including Web site updates following study completion and demonstration of how public comments influence the studies for which they are solicited.

**Best Use of Technology for Public Participation: Loop 1604 EIS**

As noted above under the project-specific effort description, the Loop 1604 EIS Web site does not appear to be currently maintained. As referenced in the May 2012 MIP Public Engagement Report, however, the outreach conducted for the EIS was awarded the “Best Use of Technology for Public Participation 2010” by the American Planning Association Technology Division. The reasons for that award are still apparent in the Web site. For example, the Loop 1604 EIS Web site included a blog, example entry shown in Figure 11. The blog itself and the quality of the blog entries demonstrate best practice of an additional platform to engage the public.
Come join us tonight for the 2nd Public Scoping Meeting for the Loop 1604 EIS!

April 13th, 2010

If you missed last night’s meeting at Valero Headquarters, there are still two more nights to join us to discuss potential improvements to Loop 1604.

Tuesday, April 13, 2010
Live Oak Civic Center Main Hall
8101 Pat Booker Road, Live Oak, TX 78233

Wednesday, April 14, 2010
Valle Middle School Cafeteria
(across from Sea World)
2120 N. Ellison Drive, San Antonio, TX 78251

It’s an Open House, so you can attend the location most convenient for you anytime between 6:00 & 9:30 PM. A short presentation about alternatives will be delivered multiple times each evening. In these meetings you will have the opportunity to visit with members of the project team to review and comment on:

1. Draft alternative recommendations for improving the Loop 1604 corridor,
2. The process being used to evaluate these alternatives, and
3. how community feedback has been incorporated to date.

If you can’t attend a meeting, you can still submit comments until Monday, April 26, 2010. For further information, please visit www.MoreFor1604.com or call 888.4LP.1604 (888-457-1604).

Figure 11. More for Loop 1604 Blog Sample.
At: http://www.morefor1604.com/wordpress/.
Clarity on Social Media for Comment: Alamo RMA Social Media Disclaimer

On a tab from its home web page, the Alamo RMA includes a “Social Media Disclaimer,” shown in Figure 12 below. The MIP team is not providing an assessment here about the wisdom of whether social media input should or should not be part of a formal public input record. What is exemplary is the clarity that the RMA is providing about this issue in the disclaimer tab. That is, the RMA is clearly stating that these forums are not being utilized for the formal input record. Most helpfully, the RMA provides on this tab links to provide official comments for inclusion into the project record, by project. This is an excellent example of best practice clarity with regard to social media usage.

Figure 12. Alamo RMA Social Media Disclaimer.
Next Steps
As described above, the San Antonio region demonstrates several Best Practice implementation efforts. Follow-through with up-to-date information on Web sites and consistency between agency approaches within the region may be areas for improvement. The various corridor EIS efforts and the PEL for IH 35 represent opportunities for the San Antonio region to clarify its community vision for the these corridors in time to most effectively leverage limited funding for improvements.

For IH 35 specifically, as a corridor making the most congested list in other regions in Texas as well, it is critical that these agencies continue to coordinate public engagement activities from previous and ongoing efforts, including the My35 effort encompassing IH 35 statewide.

Generally, the establishment of clear goals and performance measures for public engagement activities can help to focus limited resources. These goals and performance measures should be set and monitored as part of each public engagement plan or effort and throughout the process. The measures should demonstrate that all affected and interested parties are given an opportunity to provide input and that input is reflected in the project development. If adjustments are needed, they should be made early in the process. Many community meetings have already been conducted for the various corridors described above. These should continue to ensure that all perspectives are being addressed. Specific changes resulting from these meetings should be incorporated into project development and highlighted to demonstrate that opinions are being heard and heeded.

Update on the Alamo RMA
As the researchers were developing this update several issues related to the Alamo RMA arose. RMAs are a function of county government enabled by Chapter 370 of the Texas Transportation Code and approved by the voters in 2003. In June 2012 Bexar County commissioners voted to assume the management of operations of the Alamo RMA. As of March 2013 the RMA board has not officially dissolved but most of the operating staff have left the agency with only essential personnel remaining. Because the board remains, the RMA maintains primacy on large-scale improvements funded by tolls in the US 281 and Loop 1604 corridors. However, due to the very limited staff, it is unlikely that the same level of public engagement can be maintained. To some degree, these circumstances explain some of the out-of-date information noted above. If the US 281 and Loop 1604 are transferred to TxDOT responsibility, it will be imperative for TxDOT staff to continue to offer the same level of engagement activity because of the public expectation established by previous work in the region. If TxDOT San Antonio District or Division staff cannot maintain this activity, TxDOT should clearly explain differences in public engagement support as soon as it assumes responsibility for staffing of these projects.
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary
For the four regions presented here, with respect to public engagement efforts for the state’s most congested corridors, there are clearly as many different approaches for public engagement as there are projects. This flexibility of approach is desirable to ensure that the needs of each respective community and corridor are best met.

Overall, this summary of different ongoing activities should provide to the respective regions and agencies involved an opportunity for self-assessment and reflection upon current and planned public engagement efforts. An examination of practices ongoing in other regions should provide new ideas, as well. The following perspective on key challenges is proffered, followed by recommendations for next steps for these efforts.

Key Challenge: Keeping Focused While Seeing the Big Picture
As the above assessments demonstrate, a significant challenge for these metropolitan areas where these most congested corridors are located is in arriving at a programmatic approach, which addresses transportation needs at a local or regional level while also addressing cross-state travel needs, including the needs of commercial freight. That is, while the most congested corridors list appropriately identifies target improvement areas for examination, creative solutions and funding, it remains critical that these corridors also be considered in their larger or “super-corridor” context in the state. This larger context may include a corridor’s service to national and international travel needs, such as IH 35 and IH 10. In many cases the larger context is at a multi-state scale, how a corridor operates as part of this multi-state system to serve regional needs today and into the future.

The I-69 Driven by Texans initiative was described in detail in the May 2012 Public Engagement Report as a model public involvement initiative. As a continuing effort for an extensive corridor across a large area of the state, it goes well beyond the legally required steps, engages people at a grassroots level, and involves people in a way that empowers them and gives them meaningful ownership of the project development process. In addition, I-69 Driven by Texans exemplifies the four principles of effective public involvement, as illustrated by these brief examples:

- **Accessible events**—Presentations, discussions and open houses are held at multiple locations at different times of the day; information is shared at specially called gatherings and at regularly scheduled meetings of various community organizations. Information is also accessible in the sense that it is presented in four languages.
- **Engaging interactions**—Segment committee members are central to the information-sharing process. Staff members handle logistics, but it is the committee members who actually host open houses and other discussions.
- **Multi-platform strategies**—The program employs a wide range of techniques and tools, including both traditional and social media, and both one-way and two-way communication.
- **An outcome-oriented process**—By virtue of its design, I-69 Driven by Texans focused on a specific goal: ensuring that the project development process was driven by the citizens, motorists and property owners who would be affected by it. Involving people at the grassroots levels ensured that public input would be both meaningful and credible. By incorporating that input into the development process, TxDOT can demonstrate a clear and accurate illustration of public understanding and support, and elected representatives have the benefit of that understanding and support when considering policy and funding decisions related to the project.

More information on the ongoing I-69 study effort is located at: [http://www.dot.state.tx.us/drivenbytexans/](http://www.dot.state.tx.us/drivenbytexans/).

A previous effort which could inform efforts toward a regional approach is the TxDOT-led study called My35. My35 included a heavy public engagement component, including the use of stakeholder groups along segments of IH 35 through Texas (the segments are shown in [http://my35.org/about/segment_committees/default.htm](http://my35.org/about/segment_committees/default.htm). This initiative included the formation of an IH 35 Advisory Committee and four segment committees that reported to the Advisory Committee. This “from the ground up” approach with significant public involvement activities resulted in a plan that reflects the interests and concerns of citizens through local and regional recommendations for meeting the mobility needs along Texas’ IH 35 corridor. The recommendations are documented in the August 2011 IH 35 Corridor Advisory Committee Plan. The IH 35 Advisory Committee and segment committees:

- Examined the corridor challenges from a local perspective.
- Identified possible solutions.
- Offered recommendations to the committee.
- Engaged stakeholders, citizens and community leaders in developing options and alternatives.

![Figure 13. My35 Study Segments.](image)

Many of the My35 recommendations are still being considered, and the activity is still being used by TxDOT for individual project segments. Unfortunately, the connection between the My35 study and...
these ongoing efforts is not clearly made, which appears to be an opportunity lost. The My35 web site is very informative about the My35 study process, findings and recommendations. Unfortunately, it is likely confusing and unclear for the general public how the My35 study is related to the current effort by the City of Austin with TxDOT. The My35 study web site is: http://www.my35.org/default.htm.

An additional, positive example described above is NCTCOG’s North Texas 2050 visioning exercise, which included a strong public engagement component to inform North Texans about anticipated changes in the region’s future, as well as obtain their perspective on options for their future beyond “business as usual.” This effort exemplifies a best practice public engagement effort to arrive at a regional vision which can be used to support policy and project-level decisions into the future. While it is unclear if the work plan and action items are continuing, the online work plan includes specific items and responsibilities by agencies in the area, and includes communications and briefing and presentation materials to continue to use into the future to communicate the challenges faced by the region, including transportation challenges. These specific tools, work plan including action items, and annually benchmarking the effort exemplify a solid approach for institutionalizing findings from a regional visioning effort. More information is available at: http://www.visionnorthtexas.org/main.html.

Key Challenge: Enabling All Voices to be Heard, Yet Finding Elements of Consensus

This assessment of public participation efforts, for some of Texas’ largest transportation improvement projects, shows that a myriad state of practice and best practice tools are being employed to reach the many different segments of the state’s population. The trend of diversifying approaches to reach different audiences has both positive and negative implications. As an example, using technological approaches, such as web sites, to reach broader audiences is a positive step; at the same time, these Web sites should be accessible to anyone that accesses them. All components of a web site should be available in a different language, the sites should be 508-compliant to be accessed by those with disabilities and all should be optimized for mobile viewing, as well. Of course, the desired outcome of all of these engagement strategies is to make transportation decision-making an open and transparent process for as wide an audience as possible.

This document also hints at problems; as the diversity of approaches blooms, the difficulty of maintaining a consistency of message, or even keeping these items especially webpages updated, is becoming more challenging. For example, project-specific web sites provide focused attention upon a single effort, and yet when they are not maintained or updated, they can confuse more than enlighten. In another example, messaging specifically oriented toward gaining the attention of one stakeholder group may turn off others. Or an approach suitable for one type of forum (for example the traditional news release) may not be the best approach for another (contrasting example: Facebook). The attention focused upon these most congested corridors is no exception: as new and varied engagement strategies are explored, key agencies in each region must continue to coordinate a consistency of regional context, project-specific history, contemporary and engaging messaging, and follow-up activity to proactively
manage the overall regional message and avoid the confusion that can result from these efforts across multiple agencies and over time.

**Key Challenge: Linking Studies and Findings Over Time and Across Varied Efforts**

The diversity of messaging platforms listed above is related to an additional challenge for these corridors. The most congested corridor list itself is a fairly new compendium, and yet many of these corridors have been studied over time because many have a long-standing history in their respective communities. In cases where a substantial build option has resulted from a former study or where a corridor has only recently become congested as a result of new traffic demand, it may be the case that future study efforts can legitimately start afresh, examining the corridor only in its current context may be appropriate. In many cases; however, a corridor study may have resulted in minimal improvements or in a No Build decision.

In many cases, understanding the history of a corridor and previous study findings, including public and stakeholder input and concerns, is critical to understanding the current context of the corridor. For example, a previous study may have included consideration of noise walls which were later excluded from project implementation; understanding that local stakeholders’ expectations on noise walls were not previously met presents a need for understanding and engagement on a current study effort. Similarly, a poorly received past study may have left some bad feelings among community stakeholders and the general public. Being aware of these challenges allows the current study team to address these issues proactively. These examples illustrate the “why,” but not the “how.”

The “how” has become possible with web-based technology not available in previous decades. That is, many older studies are available in hardcopy format, often forgotten on staff shelves, sometimes retained as part of agency libraries or in document storage. For these older studies, it is often up to agency staff to recall the previous study and bring it to the attention of those working on current efforts. Often, this link is simply not made.

The most congested corridors list provides an opportunity for key agencies in these regions to link new and old studies together in an active, web-based repository, ideally identified by geographic location in addition to corridor name. For example, project-specific web pages such as that for the LBJ Express ([http://www.lbjexpress.com/](http://www.lbjexpress.com/)) need not disappear in years to come. Instead, this web site and others concerning this corridor (for example corridor-focused efforts by the local transit authority) should be linked and referenced via one regionally oriented web page, potentially hosted by NCTCOG. Thus, this project history is maintained and both the public and future transportation professionals may reference this study in years to come. As older hardcopy studies are referenced, as well, those most relevant to current studies can be scanned and uploaded to this digital repository, as well.

In summary, the web offers an opportunity for agencies to document and share studies for public education and to promote transparency over time. Project-specific web sites should be leveraged as both their active public participation aspects and, as time passes, to provide to the public a snapshot in time of what public concerns were in the past. Most importantly, it is critical that older study web pages be linked appropriately with current and ongoing efforts so that the public is not confused.
Enduring Challenge: Reaching the State’s Traditionally Underserved Populations

As the above report references in several locations, practices in reaching the Spanish-only and Spanish-preferred members of our communities are progressing. Adoption of a technology solution such as automatic web page translation, for example, enables users of many varied languages to access information. The public engagement community needs to continue to work with this technology and others to ensure that more of the web-accessible information by their respective agencies is accessible in translatable format or to provide additional alternatives for non-English speakers, most predominantly Spanish-speakers because of the size of this population in Texas. Spanish-summary brochures are one step forward for the longest documents, for example each MPO’s Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

Accessibility for other populations including visually impaired and hearing impaired are also of concern for Web site accessibility, given the increasing role that the web plays in being the primary information conduit for most transportation agencies today. For the hearing-impaired, this may simply involve ensuring that videos and presentations include subtitles or notes, respectively. For the visually impaired, often including older users, web-page design can play a vitally important role for accessibility. A good starting point for this information is provided by the American Foundation for the Blind at: http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?FolderID=2&SectionID=4&TopicID=167. Many of these guidelines benefit all users, not just those who are visually or hearing impaired.

Recommendations

This updated assessment documents that many best practice approaches are being used across the state, solid state-of-the-practice implementation is in place in a wide variety of agencies, and identifies improvement opportunities. As the key challenges demonstrate, the attention focused upon these most congested corridors offers a prime opportunity to demonstrate best practice strategies for public engagement. And yet, in many cases, these corridors also demonstrate similar challenges to the most minor of transportation improvement efforts: maintaining Web sites, coordinating messaging across multiple agencies, and managing the past studies to maximize their value. Researchers have the following recommendations:

- Continue to advance the statewide public engagement efforts on the importance and relevance of transportation for the state’s continued economic development and prosperity, goods and services delivery, and jobs, including aspects of how transportation affects individuals’ everyday lives.

- For each region, one of the key agencies should coordinate a single web-page location referencing the most congested corridors list (with its location), as well as other references to advance public information and regional coordination, for example:
  - Develop consistent, corridor-level summaries such as those developed for the Mobility Investment Priorities project and described earlier in this report.
  - Document current improvement efforts and the agencies involved.
  - Provide links to project-specific web pages.
• Link to previous studies (to the extent they are relevant and available for public consumption), starting with efforts already available online.
• Acknowledge region-wide efforts which may play a role in improving the corridor.

Individual project teams come and go, but, it is the key agencies in each region that play the most critical role in advancing these recommendations. As this document demonstrates, much progress has been made to date. There are additional opportunities for engaging the public, communities and stakeholders.