



Photo: Frozen Merrimack River from the Basilliere Bridge, by Alison Colby/Essex Heritage.

## Chapter 3

# Public Participation

To be effective, the RTP Planning Process must foster involvement through a proactive public participation process with all interested parties. Title 23 CFR Part 450.316(a) states the following concerning participation and consultation:

*“The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for*

*providing citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process.”*

When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft RTP and as a result of the participation process or the interagency consultation process, a summary, analysis and report of the proposed comments shall be made as part of the final RTP.

Accordingly, the MVMPO follows a formal process for engaging the public in RTP development. Its process is documented in the MVMPO’s approved Public Participation Plan (PPP). The MVMPO staff has documented all oral and written comments received on the RTP as ‘significant comments’, as has been requested by USDOT and MassDOT.

In developing the FFY 2016 RTP, the MVMPO staff and members of the public communicated about

transportation in many different ways. MVMPO staff increased efforts to stimulate regional conversations about transportation by shifting toward greater attendance and participation in meetings and events already taking place in its communities. It employed an expanded, continuously updated, regional transportation stakeholder contact list to conduct outreach. Staff also circulated RTP Fact Sheets and employed several different PowerPoint presentations, tailoring content to match specific communities and/or specific constituencies, e.g. human services constituents. Table 3.1 provides a list of those stakeholders that MVMPO met with and Appendix F includes the intake spreadsheet, which categorizes the comments received during discussions.

Notably, the 2016 RTP public outreach efforts attracted the participation of organizations created since the development of the previous RTP and/or organizations that had not previously participated in the transportation planning process. Such organizations included the Merrimack Valley Regional Coordinating Council and the Merrimack Valley branch of the NAACP.

Good discussions occurred with several groups whose members or constituents represent

protected populations, such as Community Action, Inc., the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board, and the region's Councils on Aging. Staff also attended or presented RTP information at sessions on topics related to transportation, i.e. housing, public health, and poverty, for the purpose of broadening public awareness of the importance of long-range transportation planning and to make new connections with these groups for the MVMPO's planning work going forward.

The MVMPO staff also capitalized upon new opportunities to conduct public outreach in partnership with the staff of an adjoining MPO region. This opportunity existed as some groups, like the Merrimack Valley NAACP and Community Teamwork, Inc., serve constituents in a broader Merrimack Valley context that includes communities in the NMCOG region. Staff from both MPOs presented the RTP and engaged attendees in a mutually productive conversation. The MVMPO continues to offer constituents in adjoining MPO regions in Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire opportunities to participate in RTP development.

**Table 3.1: RTP Public Outreach Opportunities (updated 6/16/15)**

<b>Regional</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Title VI/ EJ Constituents Present</b>
MVPC Region Planning Directors	1/8/15; 5/12/15	
Merrimack Valley Transportation Committee (MVTC)	1/14/2015	Yes
Legislative breakfast	1/26/2015	
MVPC Region DPW Directors	3/4/15, 4/1/15	
Community Action, Inc.	4/3/2015	Yes
Merrimack Valley Regional Coordinating Council	4/9/15; 5/14/15	Yes
MVPC Mayors and Managers	4/13/2015	
Merrimack Valley Chapter of the NAACP	4/14/2015	Yes
MVPC Commissioners	4/16/2015	
Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board	4/28/2015	Yes
General public listening session North Andover	5/12/2015	Yes
General public listening session Haverhill	5/19/2015	
Community Health Network Area (CHNA)	5/20/2015	Yes
Greater Newburyport Association of Realtors (GNAR)	5/21/2015	
General public listening session Salisbury	6/1/2015	
<b>Community-Based Organizations and Events</b>	<b>Date</b>	
Methuen Arlington Neighborhood (MAN), Inc.	3/10/2015	Yes
Newburyport Traffic and Safety Committee	3/12/2015	
Lawrence Mayor's Health Task Force	monthly	Yes
Lawrence Community Development, re: neighborhood organizations	3/26/2015	Yes
Newburyport Local Poverty Matters Discussion Group	4/1/2015	Yes
City of Lawrence	4/8/2015	Yes
ESL Program - City of Haverhill	4/10/2015	Yes
Lawrence Council on Aging (Spanish and English)	5/21/2015	Yes
Lawrence Council on Aging (Vietnamese)	6/19/2015	Yes
Council on Aging Directors	6/10/2015	Yes
Greater Lawrence Community Action Council	6/3/2015	Yes

Staff employed a variety of communication methods including one-on-one conversations, public hearings, presentations, the MVPC Web site, and the MVPC Facebook page. Staff organized information it collected during public interactions in a database that matches comments with the 2016 RTP Goals and Objectives to ensure that the RTP is responsive to the public's transportation interests.

Comments ranged among the following RTP Goals from the greatest number to the fewest:

- Improving Multimodal Connections and Encouraging Mode Shift;
- Promoting Transportation Equity;
- Promoting Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness;
- Maintaining and Improving Transportation System Safety and Security;
- Achieving and Maintaining a State of Good Repair;
- Promoting Environmental Sustainability, and
- Creating Economic Vitality.



Photo: The most requested new transit service is to Salem, New Hampshire, by Google.

### **Improving Multimodal Connections and Encouraging Mode Shift**

Most comments on this RTP goal pertained to transit, followed by pedestrian and bicyclist – related issues. Transit-related comments include:

- Reducing travel times and number of transfers for trips across the region – particularly from the coastal communities to Haverhill and Lawrence.
- Expanding the span of service to allow 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shift workers, persons attending meetings or classes, and commuters transferring from the MBTA Commuter Rail to use the MVRTA system to start/end their trips.
- Implementing transit services between MVMPO region and southern New Hampshire, particularly from

Lawrence/Methuen to Salem along Route 28.

- Increasing mobility within Haverhill by instituting a new downtown circulator.
- While some MVMPO region residents travel to work sites in New Hampshire, more New Hampshire residents travel to Massachusetts work sites. It should be an MVMPO priority to advocate for transit services that capture more New Hampshire-based commuters;

Pedestrian-related comments included better sidewalks, crosswalks, and signals generally, with emphasis in certain corridors such as Merrimack Street in Lawrence and Amesbury Road (MA-110) in Haverhill. Interestingly, one commenter advocated for improved sidewalks within and around public housing and other affordable housing units to increase access to essential services. Notably, the MVPC staff is preparing a template for affordable housing development that will address this comment.

Bicycle-related suggestions included new or improved bicycle parking at transit stations, and new facilities in key corridors.

### **Promoting Transportation Equity**

Participants offered the following transportation equity comments, most of which involved recommendations for transit:

- The MVMPO staff should increase its interactions with the region's business groups to address employee transportation needs and close transportation gaps;
- The MVMPO staff should continue to interact with its communities' Councils on Aging and should be a regular participant in the regional COA association;
- Transportation agencies should report out on minority participation in the region's transportation industry, particularly in transportation facility construction;
- The MVMPO should prioritize elder mobility and flexible transportation choices to meet projected demand increases, and
- Transit improvements should better connect the public with the region's health centers.

### **Promoting Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness**

Most comments pertained to congestion issues at specific locations:

- MA-28 south of NH border in Methuen;

- MA-114 in Lawrence and North Andover;
- Merrimack Street near the Riverwalk Complex in Lawrence and Sutton/Marblehead Streets in North Andover, and
- North Avenue in Haverhill, particularly for northbound traffic during PM peak period.

A recommendation for the first two congestion issues above is to install adaptive signals to allow traffic to progress more smoothly between intersections.

One commenter noted that many of his firms' clients use taxicabs, which are a more expensive transportation option than walking, bicycling, or using public transportation. This observation is not a new one. The recommendation is to educate constituents about transportation options and to improve bicycling, walking and transit options. These combined actions could increase transit ridership and conserve household incomes.

### **Maintaining and Improving Transportation System Safety and Security**

Most comments in this category pertained to the MA-114 Corridor in Lawrence and North Andover:

- The Merrimack College property boundary along MA-114 does not channel pedestrians to specific street crossing points in an effective manner;
- Traffic volumes are too heavy and people drive at widely varying speeds through the Merrimack College area, "making it difficult to provide a signalized pedestrian crossing";
- Audible pedestrian signals are needed or should be made operative at various locations, and
- A pedestrian crossing or overpass between Merrimack College and Royal Crest Estates is needed.

A commenter recommended that the pedestrian bridge over the MBTA tracks at Kent Street be repaired/ replaced.



Photo: The closed pedestrian bridge stands near where teenagers often cross the tracks and close to a recent pedestrian fatality.

Particular to the MA-114 corridor, the MVMPO staff notes that a Road Safety Audit (RSA) and a conceptual plan for a signalized intersection at the midpoint between Andover St. and the Andover St. Bypass have been completed. The MVMPO staff will be following up with MassDOT to advance corridor improvements during the 2016 RTP.

The Kent / Bond Sts. project (see photo) is intended to improve railroad and pedestrian safety by reducing or eliminating illegal pedestrian crossings of active MBTA/PanAm Railways' rights-of-way. The MVMPO staff will follow up on this recommendation.

### **Achieving and Maintaining a State of Good Repair**

Commenters focused on pedestrian infrastructure, transit vehicles and stations, and one railroad crossing. One commenter observed that the MBTA was preparing to close the Sutton St. MBTA railroad crossing; a sign board noted that the crossing was scheduled for a temporary closure between 5/23-5/25, 2015. The MVMPO staff attributed that temporary closure to tie replacement work along the Haverhill Line.



Photo: Significant deterioration of a sidewalk area in Lawrence.

Recommendations included:

- Restore existing deteriorated pedestrian infrastructure region-wide, particularly for elders with mobility and sight issues. For example, many people (students, clients, workers) walk from Lawrence’s Canal District along the Merrimack St. corridor to reach the Machine Shop Village section of

North Andover. Good pedestrian amenities are needed throughout this area;

- Maintain/improve condition of vans and transit stations, and
- Improve pavement conditions on MA-114 in Lawrence.

### **Promoting Environmental Sustainability**

Commenters focused on two topics relevant to environmental sustainability:

- Zero-emission vehicles. A commenter questioned how many electric vehicle charging stations existed in the region, and recommended increased electric vehicle use.
- Eco-friendly snow and ice removal. Not surprisingly, given the extreme weather conditions that the region experienced during Winter 2014-2015, a few commenters questioned what could be done to improve road and sidewalk snow/ice removal, including the potential use of solar technologies for this purpose.

Updated information for electric vehicle charging stations is available at <http://carstations.com/>. Presently, there are four such stations registered



in the MVMPO region, and nine registered in the NMMPO region.

As for solar snow/ice removal technologies, one commenter noted that East Hartford, CT had experimented with this in the 1970's. The MVMPO staff found that Idaho's Solar Roadways project received multiple research grants from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to build a solar parking lot, completed in March 2014, and raised \$2.2 million on Indiegogo, a crowd funding site, to continue development beyond the life of the FHWA grant (see [www.solarroadways.com](http://www.solarroadways.com)). The FHWA is currently reviewing test results from the solar parking lot.

### **Creating Economic Vitality**

Commenters' interests in economic vitality directly related to job access and promotion of expanded transit services as an equal employment opportunity:

- A commenter advised that a segment of the MVMPO region's workforce (and other constituents) travel regularly to North Shore/MAPC region destinations along US-1 or MA-128. Many of the larger employers in that area, particularly in the Hathorne area of Danvers (the Ferncroft – northwest

corner of US-1/MA-62) and the new Market Street area in Lynnfield, lack good access.

- The MVMPO region's workforce also faces challenges when commuting to key employment nodes along I-495, and along I-95/MA-128. It was recognized that it can be difficult to serve these trips with transit, as they are often located in isolation from one another. However, it was recommended that the MVMPO or MVRTA staff study the potential for implementing transit from the MVMPO region along MA-114 to Danvers/Peabody area and other non-Boston destinations (i.e. MA-128 employment centers in Waltham, Burlington, etc.), and to certain I-495 transit and employment centers south of the MVMPO region.
- A Merrimack Valley Regional Coordinating Council member who works with the disabled commented that the MVRTA website contained some useful trip planning information. He recommended that the MVRTA consider adding a trip planning tool to its website that could aid both employers and employees. This tool type would be especially helpful in linking persons with

disabilities to an employment opportunity. That tool might take the form of a tab that readers could use, e.g. "if you wish to reach the following destinations, e.g. employers, health care, emergency services, etc. - use Route XX"

The MVRTA has noted that it will soon be releasing a draft of its Strategic Plan. In addition, the MVRTA staff has recognized these comments and can address them independently of the Strategic Plan development process.

### **Public Participation Processes and Comments received in other MVMPO transportation planning processes and this RTP**

The MVMPO has developed this RTP with documentation of the public participation process it followed, and comments it received:

The themes and content of this RTP are also derived from the public's participation and comment in other MVMPO and Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) documents, including:

- The MVPC Priority Growth Strategy 2014 Update

<http://mvpc.org/programs/comprehensive-planning/priority-growth-strategy/>

- The MVMPO Active Transportation Plan (2014) <http://mvpc.org/wp-content/uploads/Active-Transportation-Plan-2014-final-draft1.pdf>
- The MVMPO Coordinated Human Services Transportation-Public Transportation Plan (2015) <http://mvpc.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-2014-Coordinated-Plan-Report.pdf>

These documents are accessible electronically via the MVPC website and in hard copy format at the MVPC offices.