

Chapter 1 – Executive Summary

Background

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) has been prepared to: expand the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) outreach; support two-way dialogue with customers; supplement customer research feedback; provide non-customer input into decision-making; and fulfill the obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states that "no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."¹ In accordance with federal guidelines, WMATA must submit to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) a PPP that details the Authority's plans and strategies to engage minority and Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations in its planning and programming activities.

These efforts may be part of a broader framework that also includes outreach strategies for other traditionally underserved constituencies, such as people with disabilities and low-income populations.

As a recipient of federal funds and per Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations,² FTA directs WMATA to:

- Ensure that the level and quality of public transportation service is provided in a nondiscriminatory manner;
- Promote full and fair participation in public transportation decision-making without regard to race, color, or national origin;
- Ensure meaningful access to transit-related programs and activities by persons with limited English proficiency.³

The FTA requires that public transit providers create a PPP that describes both the proactive strategies the Authority will use to engage minority and LEP populations and the desired outcomes of this outreach. This plan can be part of a broader public participation strategy that also targets other traditionally underserved communities, including low-income populations and people with disabilities.

By developing and utilizing strategies that improve the accessibility of WMATA's outreach for those groups that have a number of constraints and barriers that limit participation, the accessibility of outreach for all persons, regardless of minority status, income level, or the ability to speak English, will improve. Public participation activities will be designed to be accessible to all persons, and planned through a single, inclusive process.

Developing the Plan

WMATA's PPP was developed through a year-long, multi-step process and led by a cross-departmental team with representation from offices and departments that currently lead public outreach activities. It establishes four thematic goals for agency-wide public participation: Inclusiveness, Collaboration,





¹ 42 USC Section 200d

² FTA C 4702.1B

³ FTA C 4702.1B

Responsiveness, and Consistency. It is against these goals that public participation outcomes will be measured. Figure 1 elaborates on these goals.

Figure 1 Public Participation Plan (PPP) Goals

 Inclusive	<p>Actively facilitate the involvement of all communities that may be affected in the public participation process, including those that are traditionally hard to reach, through culturally sensitive methods.</p>
 Collaborative	<p>Work jointly with the community throughout the planning and project development process.</p>
 Responsive	<p>Proactively link public feedback to outcomes in order to build trust.</p>
 Consistent	<p>Ensure established guidelines from the PPP are followed throughout WMATA.</p>

There are a number of planning and programming activities WMATA undertakes that will activate the PPP. These include: planning projects, selection of amenities and infrastructure, environmental analyses, service changes, public information campaigns and development of policy alternatives – such as fare changes. The PPP has been designed to identify strategies that can be employed for each of these project types, while recognizing that different approaches and attention may be required depending upon the constituencies affected by these actions.

The PPP development process included five major activities designed to identify industry best practices in this area, as well as public preferences regarding outreach and engagement specific to the WMATA service area. WMATA staff and Board of Director interviews provided a comprehensive look at public participation practices at the agency today, as well as ideas for future practices. Figure 2 summarizes these activities.

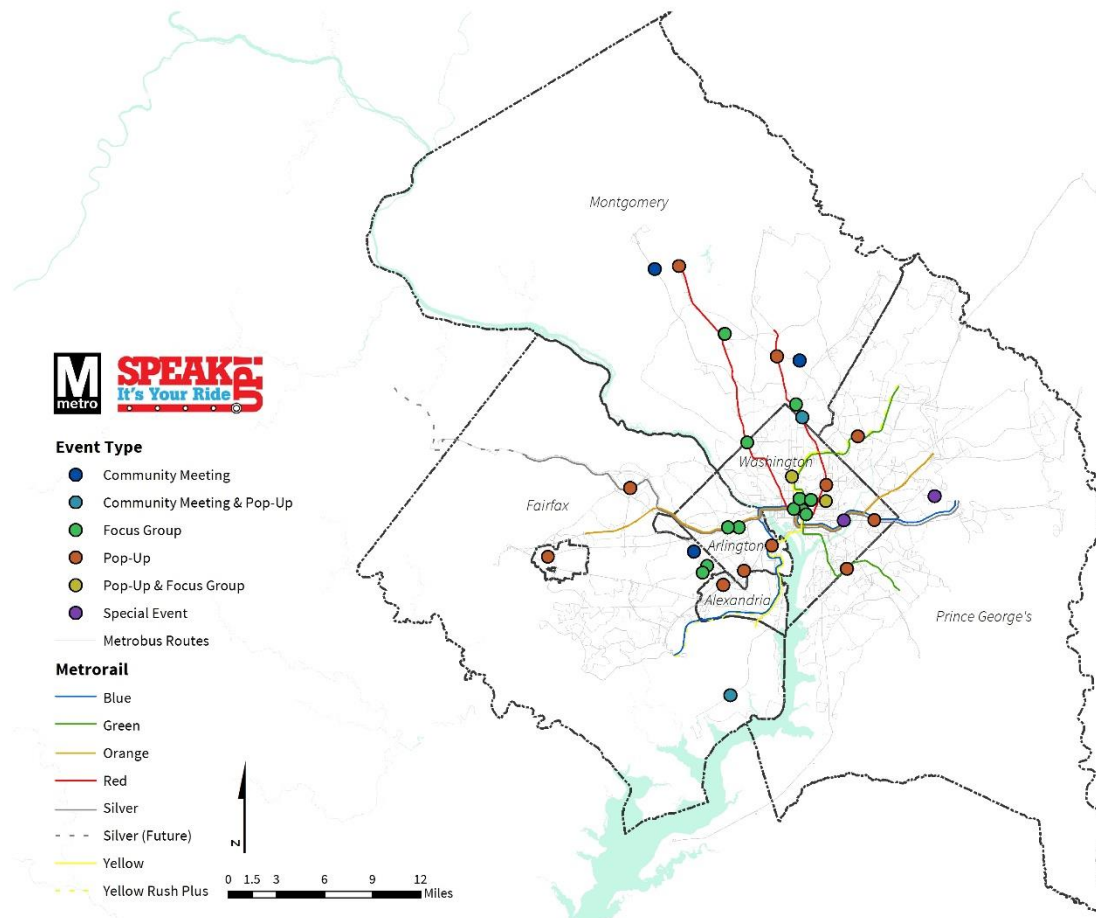
At the heart of the project was a robust and multi-faceted public outreach campaign – *Speak Up! It's Your Ride* - designed to obtain information about communications and public participation preferences from diverse groups in the WMATA service area. Audiences included many minority, immigrant, and ethnic groups, the disability community, seniors, the homeless, and the economically disadvantaged.

Figure 2 Public Participation Plan (PPP) Development Process



The campaign encompassed 38 outreach events in the WMATA service area occurring over the course of three months from February through April 2014. It included 15 in-depth focus groups with 41 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and 23 public outreach events ranging in size and focus. Figure 3 shows the location and event type for the 23 Speak Up! events and the 15 focus group meetings where WMATA staff met with CBOs and their constituents.⁴

⁴ Two locations were used to hold both a *Speak Up! It's Your Ride Survey* event and a focus group meeting.

Figure 3 *Speak Up! It's Your Ride* Outreach Event Locations

Speak Up! It's Your Ride Survey

To capture information from participants about the methods of engagement that work best for them, the project included a survey administered at all events and available on-line. Surveys were generally administered on tablet computers, though some groups used paper versions, and were translated into the seven major non-English languages spoken in the WMATA service area. In total, 1,726 surveys were completed at *Speak Up! It's Your Ride* events; an additional 1,787 surveys were taken online. Of the respondents, 69% were minorities, 28% were low-income, and 10% were LEP.

The information collected from the outreach to the general public and from CBOs was used to inform the outreach strategies in the PPP to ensure that WMATA's public outreach efforts are inclusive and accessible for all. The results of the *Speak Up! It's Your Ride* campaign provided insights about the following:

- Strategies CBOs use to reach their clients/constituents, and their perspectives about collaborating with WMATA;
- Communication and feedback preferences from 3,513 survey respondents; and
- Successes and challenges for each outreach event.

The next sections detail some of the key findings from the public outreach campaign and from peer, WMATA staff, and Board interviews.

Key Findings

Customer Preferences

The extensive outreach conducted identified the following customer preferences that can be implemented to engage all populations, including minority, low-income, and LEP in WMATA's public events:

- *To involve Title VI populations, go where they are.* Just 10 percent of individuals who participated in the PPP's outreach had ever been to a WMATA public meeting. Holding events where minority, low-income, and LEP population are — at transit centers, CBOs, shopping centers, and festivals — is the most effective method for reaching these populations.
- *Demonstrate cultural sensitivity.* Know your audience and bring the appropriate WMATA staff (subject matter, cultural, and linguistic expertise) to events and meetings.
- *Make it convenient to attend events.* When asked what would make it easier to attend a meeting, all demographic and cultural groups except LEP populations chose the same top three options: location near work or home, convenient time of day, and near public transportation. LEP groups choose the use of interpreters instead of convenient time of day. Asian/Pacific Islanders, low-income, and LEP participants expressed a preference for meeting on weekends, instead of during the week.
- *Tailor event formats to the preferences of groups whose input is sought.* Meeting formats should be tailored to the preferences of individual groups or communities. White/Caucasian, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander survey respondents all indicated "Question and Answer Session" as their most preferred meeting format; Black/African American respondents selected "Show of Hands Voting." Electronic voting at events did not work well with senior citizens. All demographic and cultural groups selected surveys, open discussions, and question and answer sessions highly as preferred meeting formats.
- *Translate materials and use graphics.* Informational materials should be available in the target population's native language and should be designed with graphics and minimal text.
- *Use ethnic media and distribution outlets.* Materials should be distributed through ethnic/racial media outlets and to locations that many riders frequent, including on the bus (*Black/African American, Hispanic, low-income, and LEP preference*), at bus stops, and at Metrorail Stations (*all races, LEP and low-income populations*). Materials should also be distributed to locations that are not necessarily transit related, such as CBOs, libraries, grocery stores, and residences.
- *Newspaper advertising still works.* All races, low-income, and LEP respondents most often chose newspapers as a preferred way to receive community information; low-income and LEP respondents were far less likely to hear about events via the internet.
- *Include children.* Providing activities for children allows parents to attend and to be attentive.
- *Acknowledge and use input.* It should be explicitly evident how the public input will be used in decision making.

Peer, Staff and Board Interviews

Below are select recommendations from Staff and Board of Director interviews and the best practices review:

- *Establish an institutional framework for public participation that includes a lead department.* Generally, there should be a department that is specifically tasked with overseeing public participation and/or a process that facilitates the involvement of several departments.
- *Work with CBOs to build relationships and trust across diverse populations.* CBOs are nonprofit groups that support local communities and are among the most effective resources available to a transit agency for facilitating the frequent contact that is needed to build trust and mutually beneficial relationships. Many of the peer agencies have established CBO partnership committees to help develop and implement broad-based public involvement.
- *Meet people where they are.* Peer agencies and staff stressed the need to “meet people where they are” rather than to expect riders and other members of the public to attend agency meetings and to structure participation activities to be as inclusive as possible.
- *Use a variety of tactics to get the word out.* While getting the word out through CBOs was universal, many agencies employed other techniques as well, such as using student report card distribution times to get information to families, door-to-door outreach in targeted areas, use of ethnic media, etc. WMATA staff has experienced success using some of these techniques in their more recent public outreach.
- *Use technology appropriately.* Several of the agencies interviewed feel that, while it has its place in public participation, technology should supplement other forms of outreach. Technology was effective when used with online surveys, webinars, or for platforms like MindMixer.
- *Use a recurring public forum.* Staff suggested the creation of a recurring forum to allow members of the public to provide feedback to WMATA regarding issues of concern to them. This feedback will supplement existing opportunities to comment on specific projects, proposals, and plans.

Recommendations

Per FTA requirements for the PPP, WMATA identified proactive strategies that engage minority, low-income, and LEP communities; created a process and set of procedures that will facilitate inclusive participation; and developed a set of performance measures that will track whether the agency is reaching its desired outcomes.

The PPP includes recommended strategies to ensure that WMATA’s public participation activities are effective, efficient, and compliant with federal requirements for inclusive public participation. These strategies were developed from information gathered during the PPP development process. WMATA will be accountable to the FTA for ensuring that the procedural strategies adopted by the Authority in the PPP are successfully implemented.

Strategy 1: Public Participation Toolkit and Project Communications/Outreach Plan

Using customer preference information gathered in the *Speak Up! It’s Your Ride* Campaign, staff interviews, and peer agency best practices, WMATA designed a toolkit to help project managers plan effective outreach. The centerpiece of the Toolkit is the Project Communications/Outreach Plan (PCOP). Every WMATA project will use the PCOP to plan public participation activities. The PCOP includes matrices that will enable staff to select events, venues, media, and other activities that will effectively

reach target populations for a particular project. The Toolkit also includes population-specific media outreach lists, a CBO database, and a comprehensive list of annual festivals and other events in WMATA's service area.

WMATA will establish a CBO Outreach Committee as a way of collaborating with local CBOs to develop strategies that are tailored to specific project proposals, to ensure meaningful, broad-based public participation, and to build a new avenue for knowledge transfer between WMATA and the CBOs. The Committee membership will be a cross-section of the service area both geographically and by type of CBO.

Strategy 2: Performance Measures

Performance measure data that focuses on participant demographics, participant feedback, and participant follow-up will be collected for each public participation project. An annual performance report will aggregate measures from the individual project and the results of an annual survey of CBOs. The annual performance report will provide an overview of outreach activities throughout the year, identifying practices or locations that were successful, and drawing conclusions for future outreach based on lessons learned.

Strategy 3: Public Participation Training

To ensure the successful, uniform adoption of the Toolkit and an Authority-wide understanding of Title VI requirements for public participation, WMATA staff involved in public outreach will be required to use the Toolkit and will receive training on the use of the Toolkit and the PPP.

Strategy 4: Centralized Public Participation Office

In addition to the Toolkit, the PPP recommends that WMATA establish a centralized office to manage public outreach. The Office of External Relations (EREL) will be tasked with providing expert assistance to project/planning staff for their individual projects. Additionally, the office will manage all project-based public participation activities, as well as provide oversight and coordination for public participation within WMATA. EREL will ensure consistency across the Authority, quality control of communications and outreach materials, coordination with Marketing around advertising, and PPP plan compliance. The Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (OEEO) will be tasked with additional functions related to managing relationships and outreach with CBOs.

Conclusion

WMATA's PPP is a comprehensive document that includes articulated and attainable goals, tested local strategies, internal organizational and procedural strategies, and detailed guidelines for executing inclusive, consistent, collaborative, and responsive public outreach. In creating this plan, WMATA set out not only to be compliant with FTA requirements, but also to become a leader in progressive public participation. The PCOP and Toolkit and procedural strategies outlined in the PPP, will result in a more efficient and effective system of public participation that yields inclusive and meaningful public input by all groups in the community that WMATA serves, regardless of their socio-economic status, minority status, or ability to speak English.

Speak Up! It's Your Ride Outreach Pop-Up Event at DC USA Mall



