




Public Participation Plan

Adopted February 22, 2018


Updated June xx, 2024

HOW TO GET INVOLVED


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Visit us online

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- Website: <https://rvarc.org/what-we-do/transportation/public-participation/>
 - Facebook: Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission, <https://www.facebook.com/rvarc/>
 - Twitter: [Roanoke Valley TPO](https://twitter.com/roanokempo), @roanokempo

Come to an event

- 
- The RVTPO hosts special events and workshops throughout Roanoke Valley. Visit the RVTPO website at <http://rvarc.org> to learn more.
 - Attend an RVTPO Policy Board or Transportation Technical Committee meeting.
 - The RVTPO Policy Board meets on the fourth Thursday of the month at 1:00 pm.
 - The RVTPO Transportation Technical Committee meets on the second Thursday of the month at 1:30 pm.

RESOLUTION (Hold for new Resolution post-adoption)

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Introduction to Transportation Planning

Daily mobility and the efficient movement of goods and services are foundational to the region's economic vitality and quality of life. A well-designed and integrated transportation network creates numerous benefits, including enhanced connectivity, accessibility, reliability, and safety, the building blocks of sustained growth and vibrant, livable communities. The development of a robust transportation network is not the result of chance or ad-hoc decision-making. Instead, the strategic investment of limited infrastructure resources requires a holistic, long-range planning process. Bringing together representatives of local and state governments, regional stakeholders, and the broader community, the Roanoke Valley Transportation Planning Organization (RVTPO) provides a forum for deliberative collaboration to identify transportation infrastructure needs and to envision and plan for the future mobility needs of the region.

Under the federal law that governs the utilization of federal investment in the region's transportation infrastructure, the RVTPO is required to develop plans that address all modes of surface transportation, including highways, streets, public transportation, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan updated every five years, includes a list of the transportation projects that are planned for funding and scheduled to be constructed over the next 20 years. The RVTPO is also responsible for creating a shorter-range plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, which includes all of the transportation projects that will be funded, designed, and built over the next four years.

Transportation projects listed on either the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan or the Transportation Improvement Program range from projects in the conceptual stage to "shovel-ready," a thoroughly studied and developed project. While the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program each have a public input process, projects on the list may have their own targeted public input processes, depending on their scope and funding sources. As implied in its title, the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan requires participants in the planning process to consider a 20-year horizon and to envision how the region's transportation system will align with broader regional goals like economic development and environmental sustainability.

The RVTPO strives to promote transparency and meaningful engagement in all phases of the transportation planning process. Substantive public input processes rely on a variety of mediums, including workshops, public hearings, surveys, comment periods, online resources, social media, and numerous committees and workgroups. The recent proliferation of communication tools adds a layer of complexity to the development of public participation strategies while creating an opportunity to expand participation. These emerging technologies may also create new or unforeseen barriers for some users.

This updated public participation plan will present various strategies the RVTPO can leverage to lower barriers to communication and support active and continuous outreach and engagement. The first section of the plan provides an overview of federal and state transportation funding sources and examines the core functions of the Transportation Planning Organization in the allocation of these resources. The second section will describe principles and objectives that will guide the development of the RVTPO outreach efforts. The third section will highlight the tools that will be utilized to achieve meaningful and

continuous engagement. Finally, the plan will outline opportunities for ongoing improvement through evaluation of the RVTPO's public participation activities.

1.1 Transportation Funding

Transportation infrastructure is supported through a combination of state, federal, local, and regional revenues.

Surface Transportation Funding

Federal

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, transportation infrastructure was funded through federal General Fund appropriations and a hodge-podge of state vehicle registration fees and fuel taxes. Following the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1956, federal surface transportation programs were funded by a tax on motor fuels credited to the Highway Trust Fund. Since 1956, funding challenges and delays in the construction of the Interstate Highway System have forced Congress to extend the Highway Trust Fund and approve periodic increases to the federal motor fuels tax. The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 last increased the gas tax to its current level of 18.4 cents.

Despite this dedicated revenue source, spending began to outpace available resources in the 2000s, leading Congress to authorize transfers from the Treasury General Fund to maintain the solvency of the Highway Trust Fund. The 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) authorized federal spending on highways and public transportation programs through September 30, 2026, including additional General Fund transfers. The IIJA also authorized additional non-trust fund sums through multi-year supplemental appropriations, including an additional \$47 billion for highways and \$21 billion for public transportation through FY2026.

State

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the prevailing ideology in the Commonwealth was “pay as you go” which capped investment in transportation to available taxes and fees.

Pressured by the expansion of the federal government in the post-World War II era and accompanying population growth, particularly in the Northern Virginia suburbs, lawmakers approved periodic increases in fuel and vehicle registration taxes but largely adhered to the traditional “pay-as-you-go” approach to meet the growing demand for modernized infrastructure. In 1986, a blue-ribbon commission created by then-Governor Baliles recommended a series of new funding mechanisms, including an increase to the state sales tax dedicated to transportation. In addition, the Commission also recommended the use of bonds to finance major transportation projects in the Commonwealth.

Following the passage of an omnibus transportation funding package (HB2313) in 2013, transportation leaders in the Commonwealth developed a project scoring methodology known as SMART SCALE. This metric-driven approach evaluates projects across five categories, including safety, congestion, accessibility, environment, and economic development, and calculates an expected project benefit score

relative to the cost of other competing projects. Before the implementation of SMART SCALE, projects were often subject to changing political fortunes and therefore not guaranteed to be fully funded or completed.

Faced once again with a structural imbalance between available revenues and escalating costs to maintain and improve its transportation system, lawmakers considered another omnibus transportation funding package during the 2020 General Assembly session. ¹ Lawmakers ultimately approved a combination of tax rate increases, including the conversion of the gas tax to a cents-per-gallon tax that is indexed to inflation, a new regional motor fuels tax for localities that were not already subject to a regional tax, and a Highway User Fee for alternative and fuel-efficient vehicles. ² As a 2021 JLARC report on transportation funding notes “New revenues should help to close reported budget gas for state road, bridge, and special structure maintenance programs. The state will also have substantially more funding for multimodal projects that improve the system, such as projects that address congestion or safety problems, but will not be able to pay for all potential improvement projects identified by the state, regions, and localities.” ³

The century-old struggle to develop adequate funding mechanisms to meet the changing demands of a mobile society continues to challenge policymakers at the federal and state levels. For the first two decades of the 20th century, revenues generated from motor fuel taxes have not kept pace with outlays. Projections at the federal level indicate that the gap between surface transportation revenues and spending will approach \$40 billion annually.⁴ Yet, the development of viable alternative funding mechanisms has remained elusive. Americans have considerable historical experience with paying the gas tax, which is easy to assess, collect, and administer. Several states have experimented with alternatives, including pilot programs for a vehicle-miles traveled tax. Four states, including the Commonwealth of Virginia, have implemented full VMT programs beyond the pilot stage.⁵

Public Transportation

Currently, federal support for public transportation programs through the Mass Transit Account is authorized under the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act. Substantive federal support for public

¹ Funds available for SMART SCALE fell by more than \$150 million from 2017-2019. JLARC, “Transportation Infrastructure and Funding,” November 8, 2021. Available: <https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt556-1.pdf>

² See HB1414, 2020 General Assembly, Available: <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+oth+HB1414FER122+PDF>

³ JLARC, “Transportation Infrastructure and Funding,” November 8, 2021. Page 12. Available: <https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt556-1.pdf>

⁴ Congressional Research Service, “Funding and Financing Highways and Public Transportation Under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act,” May 24, 2003. Available: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47573>

⁵ Beginning in FY23, Virginia’s VMT program allows owners of electric and other fuel-efficient vehicles to pay an annual fee equal to 85 percent of the amount of gas tax that would be paid on an equivalent amount of fuel that would be used by a vehicle with a combined fuel economy of 23.7 miles per gallon at an average number of vehicles miles traveled by a passenger vehicle in Virginia, or 11,600 miles. At the federal level, the IJA provides \$50 million to the U.S. Department of Transportation to develop a nationwide VMT pilot. See: Owen Minott, “Mileage-Based Use Fee Pilot Programs and the IJA,” Bipartisan Policy Center, February 11, 2022, Available: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/mileage-based-user-fee-pilot-programs-and-the-ija/>

transportation began with the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964 as private transit companies, struggling with debt, were reorganized as public entities. Congress subsequently established an annual formula grant program in 1974 to support transit operations, and in 1982, Congress created a new Mass Transit account to be funded through a one-cent increase to the federal gas tax. This share would increase to 2.86 cents in the 1990's.

In the Commonwealth, funding for public transportation is provided through the Commonwealth Transportation Fund which is a formula-based distribution to the Mass Transit Fund and Rail Fund. The key programs include state operating assistance grants, capital assistance grants, and the new Dept. of Rail and Passenger Transit, Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) which was authorized by the Virginia General Assembly in 2020. The TRIP program receives 6% of the Commonwealth Mass Transit Fund which is used to support zero-fare and reduced-fare projects and regional connectivity projects with grant recipients providing matching funds. Transit capital projects are also supported through CPR bonds under the Commonwealth Transit Capital Fund.⁶ Certain transit projects, including transit and rail capacity expansion, are also eligible for funding under the Commonwealth's SMART SCALE program.

Role of RVTPO Policy Board

The RVTPO Policy Board guides investment of federal, state, and local transportation funding resources. The RVTPO has direct decision-making authority over three federal sub-allocation programs:

- A) Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG)
- B) Carbon Reduction Program (CRP)
- C) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

Available funding for these programs is allocated through a federal formula based on the region's population in proportion to other metropolitan areas in the Commonwealth. In coordination with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, the Policy Board also approves apportionment of Federal Transit Authority 5310 funding which provides transportation services to older adults and people with disabilities. Numerous federal and state statutes also require active consultation between the Commonwealth and the RVARC and RVTPO in the development of the statewide transportation plan or VTRANS, the statewide project prioritization process, or SMART SCALE, and regional planning efforts.⁷ Finally, the Policy Board also provides strategic guidance on the submission of projects under Virginia's SMART SCALE competitive funding process.

As the steward of limited transportation infrastructure resources, the RVTPO must strategically allocate available funding to meet the goals envisioned in the [Roanoke Valley Transportation Plan](#). The Public Participation Plan outlined below will provide guidance and outreach techniques designed to engage key partners, stakeholders, and the public in a transparent, deliberative, and representative process.

⁶ For more information, see Department of Rail & Public Transportation, "Annual Budget Fiscal Year 2024," Available: https://drpt.virginia.gov/wpcontent/uploads/2023/09/FY24_CTB_Final_Annual_Budget_Document-2.pdf

⁷ For a list of statutory requirements, see <https://vtrans.org/about/statutory-requirements>

1.2 Six Core Functions of Metropolitan Planning Organizations⁸

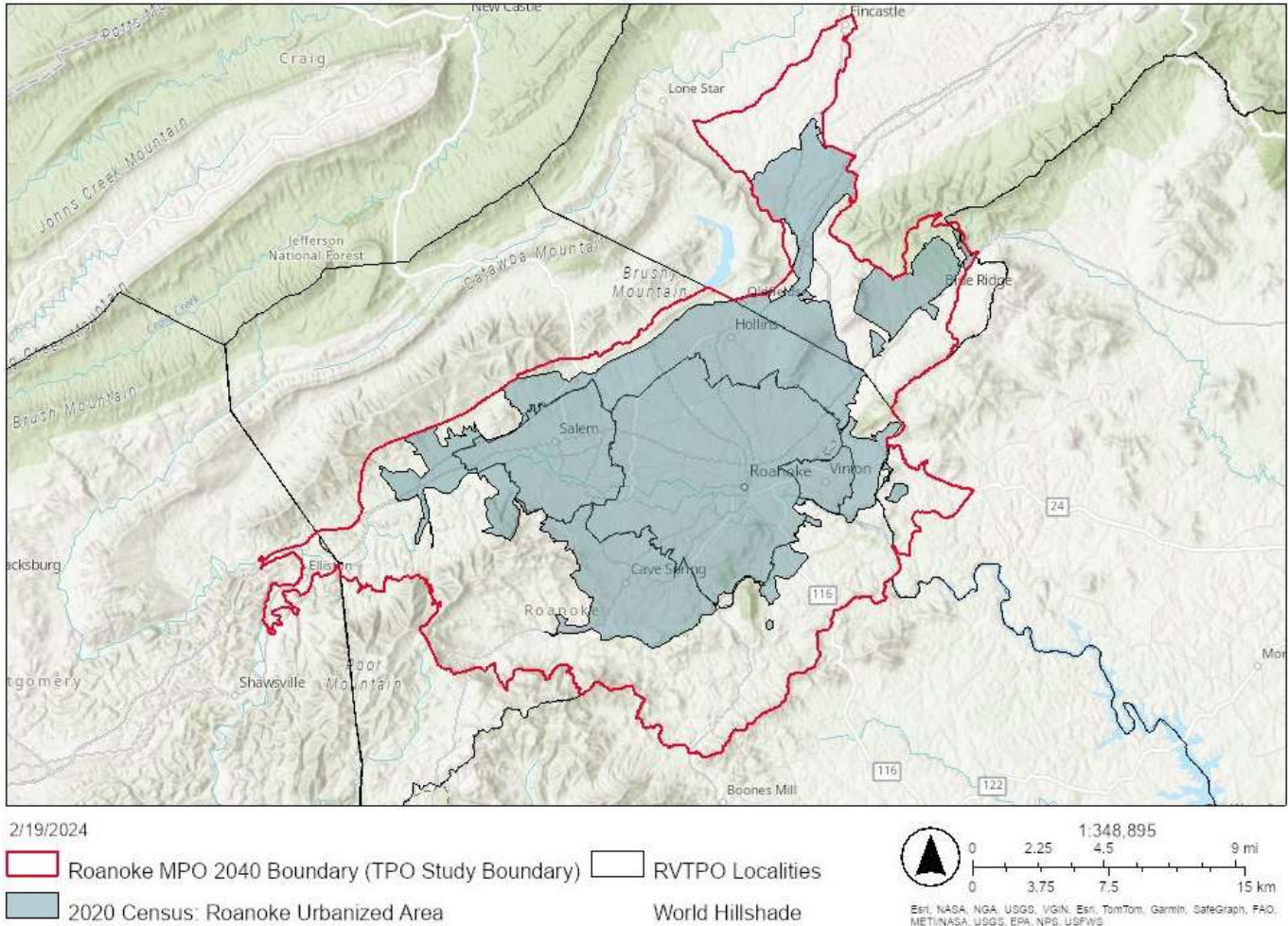
Federal legislation passed in the early 1970s requires that any urbanized area with a population greater than 50,000 have a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). As the MPO of the Roanoke Valley urbanized area (**Error! Reference source not found.**), the RVTPO has the authority and responsibility to plan and budget the use of federal transportation funding in the Roanoke Region. The members review and approve the Long-Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and all related amendments. The RVTPO Transportation Technical Committee provides technical support to facilitate decision-making. The RVTPO policy board performs the vital role of coordination and consensus-building in planning and programming funds for projects and operations.

The RVTPO is a coalition of agencies and local and state governments:

- Bedford County
- Botetourt County
- Montgomery County
- Roanoke County
- City of Roanoke
- City of Salem
- Town of Vinton
- Greater Roanoke Transit Company (Valley Metro)
- Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport
- Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
- Virginia Department of Transportation
- Federal Highway Administration (non-voting)
- Federal Transit Administration (non-voting)
- Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (non-voting)
- Franklin County (non-voting)

Figure 1

RVTPO 2045 Boundary and 2020 Census UZA



According to the Federal Highway Association, the RVTPO is tasked with six core functions:

1. **Establish a forum for effective decision-making.** The RVTPO oversees an open and structured forum for effective regional decision-making in the metropolitan area.
2. **Identify and evaluate transportation improvement options.** The RVTPO, working in conjunction with the TTC, uses data and planning best practices to develop transportation improvement options. Planning studies and technical studies are included in the Unified Planning Work Program.
3. **Prepare and maintain a Metropolitan Transportation Plan.** The RVTPO implements goals contained in Vision 2045, the RVTPO’s Metropolitan Transportation Plan, which covers a 20-year planning horizon. To guide the planning process, the RVTPO considers the following planning factors:
 - Support economic vitality, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
 - Increase the safety of the transportation system for both motorized and non-motorized users;
 - Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;

- Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight;
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes throughout the Commonwealth, for people and freight;
- Promote efficient system management and operation;
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system;
- Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation; and
- Enhance travel and tourism.

4. **Develop a Transportation Improvement Program.** The RVTPO develops a short-range, four-year program of priority transportation improvements drawn from the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan, consistent with all operating and regulatory requirements. The Transportation Improvement Program identifies immediate priority actions to achieve regional goals and associated system performance targets.
5. **Identify performance measure targets and monitor whether implemented projects are achieving targets.** The RVTPO coordinates with State and public transportation operators to establish performance targets that address performance measures, as outlined in Federal law, related to surface transportation and public transportation. Plans address performance measures and standards. In addition to Federally required performance measures, the RVTPO may identify locally significant performance indicators to guide decision-making.
6. **Involve the public.** The metropolitan transportation planning process must engage the public and stakeholders in all facets of the planning process. Ongoing engagement is especially important in the development phase of the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program. The RVTPO strives to ensure that all stakeholders are broadly represented in the transportation planning process.

The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for providing citizens...and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process. (Code of Federal Regulations §450.316)

1.3 Opportunities for Public Participation

The RVTPO is responsible for designing and implementing an open, cooperative, and collaborative process that provides meaningful opportunities for participation in transportation planning decisions. In the past, federal regulations required a public comment period on the final draft of a document. Current planning efforts incorporate opportunities for public participation at several stages throughout the planning process.

Public hearings and comment periods are required in the development of the following plans:

Plan	Updates
Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan	Every five years, a 20-year time frame
Transportation Improvement Program	Every three years, a four-year time frame
Public Participation Plan	Reviewed for updates every three years
Amendments and other regional plans and studies	As needed or requested

Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan

The Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan envisions the evolution of the regional transportation system, including all of the transportation projects that will be funded and scheduled over the next 20 years. The LRPT should address current and anticipated needs related to safety and congestion, the impact of technological innovation on transportation habits and choices, and potential environmental impacts. Federal law requires that the plan “include both long-range and short-range program strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated intermodal transportation system that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods.” The Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan is prepared through active engagement with the public and stakeholders using an approach that considers how roadways, transit, nonmotorized transportation, and intermodal connections can improve the operational performance of the multimodal transportation system.

The Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan typically includes:

- Performance measures and targets;
- Evaluation of the performance of the transportation system;
- Scenario analyses of transportation system conditions and performance;
- An evaluation of regional land use, development, housing, and employment goals and plans;
- Projected demand for transportation services over 20 years;
- Recommendations on policy, strategies, and projects;
- Cost estimates and reasonably available financial sources for operation, maintenance, and capital investment;
- Opportunities to preserve facilities and efficiently use the existing system

The RVTPO must demonstrate that expected revenue sources balance with the estimated costs of projects and programs envisioned in the Plan. A key element of the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan is the Fiscally Constrained List of Projects or the list of regionally significant transportation projects planned over a 20-year time horizon.

The prioritization framework adopted by the RVTPO identifies key considerations for the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan, including

- Transportation needs
- Regional and local priorities
- Solutions

- Projects
- Alignment review (meet needs, attain goals)

Transportation Improvement Program

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a comprehensive list of highways, transit, bicycle/pedestrian, and other projects that have been allocated federal transportation funds over the next four years. These projects are also typically included in the Fiscally Constrained List of Projects in the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan. The TIP signifies local approval for projects to be included in the state's Six-Year Improvement Program process. The Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) programs funds on a one-year basis with the remaining five years shown as projections in the Six-Year Improvement Program.

Public Participation Plan

RVTPO staff review the Public Participation Plan every three years to determine whether an update or full redevelopment of the plan is necessary. If only minor updates are necessary, staff may choose to use the Transportation Technical Committee and the final public comment and review period as an opportunity for public involvement in the adoption of the updated plan.

Other Opportunities for Public Participation

Amendments to the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, and the Public Participation Plan also include opportunities for public participation. In addition, the Congestion Management Process, the Pedestrian Vision Plan, and the Transit Vision Plan are examples of regional plans that also include a public participation component.

The TPO also adopts a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), the principal budgetary document that identifies planning priorities and activities that will be conducted by the MPO each fiscal year. The Plan includes a brief description of planning activities and resulting products, the person(s) who will perform the work, a schedule for completion, cost estimates, and the sources of funding.

The RVTPO performs a coordinative role in regional transportation planning, providing a forum for participation for relevant agencies and stakeholders. Much of this critical work occurs in the RVTPO's committees and workgroups. In addition, subcommittees are periodically empaneled by the chairs of the RVTPO's committees to conduct in-depth analysis on specific topics.

RVTPO Policy Board

The Roanoke Valley Transportation Planning Organization Policy Board is the transportation policy decision-making board consisting of elected representatives of the member governmental subdivisions contained in the Roanoke urbanized area and other transportation-related organizations as required by federal or state statute and/or deemed necessary by the RVTPO Policy Board and non-elected voting members.

RVTPO Transportation Technical Committee (TTC)

The Transportation Technical Committee advises the RVTPO Policy Board on technical matters and

develops planning and programming recommendations. The TTC consists of topic experts, including planners and engineers, who represent member governments and transportation/transit agencies.

The Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee

The Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (formerly the Bicycle Advisory Committee) was established in 2008 to facilitate regional collaboration with diverse stakeholders involved in bicycle and pedestrian planning in the Roanoke Valley. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee serves as a forum for discussion of bicycling and pedestrian issues, sharing new data and best practices, and informing stakeholders of regional projects, events, and accomplishments. The committee meets on the third Wednesday at 3 PM every other month.

Purpose and Objectives

In March 2024, the RVTPO conducted a public participation survey designed to assess civic participation trends, media preferences, and knowledge about RVTPO engagement activities. The survey also collected respondent demographic data. Results from this survey are presented in Appendix 2.

While only a snapshot in time, the results of the survey provide a glimpse of public engagement habits, media consumption preferences, and working knowledge of RVTPO activities, creating an initial starting point for the enhancement of the RVTPO's public engagement objectives and strategies. Continuous outreach activities will provide additional opportunities to calibrate these objectives and strategies.

Respondents to the 2024 survey identified numerous barriers that limit their attendance at local government meetings and participation with civic or neighborhood organizations, including conflicts between the scheduled times of these meetings with work or other priorities. A few respondents cited their lack of efficacy, a belief that they have little influence over the governmental process. Most respondents indicated that they prefer to receive news through digital devices with some indicating a preference for all of the above approaches, including TV, print, radio, desktops/laptops, and mobile devices. Approximately half indicated they see information on transportation projects at least monthly on the news or from other sources. A sizable majority indicated that their preferred method for sharing feedback on local transportation projects would be through online surveys. A demographic breakdown of the survey is available in Appendix 2.

Based in part on the survey results and a review of best practices, the RVTPO's Public Participation Plan sets the following short- and long-term goals for public engagement and participation and an accompanying list of tactics designed to achieve these goals. While some of the goals may be considered aspirational, progress on their implementation will be evaluated periodically and will be used to inform the RVTPO's overall approach to public participation and engagement moving forward.

- **Meaningful to the public** – To increase efficacy in planning activities, participants should feel that their contributions to the planning process are meaningful and that their viewpoints and interests are reflected in planning documents.

- **High quality** - Clarity of purpose and expectations throughout the planning process will improve the quality of public input. The RVTPO should create opportunities for lateral communication practices that allow for reasoned dialogue among participants.
- **Representative** – RVTPO Policy Board decisions should be representative and multi-vocal, reflective of a diverse range of community and user interests.
- **Accessible** – Opportunities for participation and engagement should be accessible across multiple venues and formats.

RVARC assures that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100.259), be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity. RVARC further assures that every effort will be made to ensure nondiscrimination in all its programs and activities, whether they are federally funded or not.

Objective 1: Meaningful to the public

People should feel that their comments matter.

One potential barrier to participation is that citizens might lose interest in planning activities when they realize that a planning effort, like the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan, won't fix immediate transportation problems like potholes on their street. Staff should set detailed expectations on the public's role in the process and create participant-centric content and activities.

The RVTPO can support relevance through:

- *Providing clarity on the estimated time commitment to participate in planning activities;*
- *Being responsive to comments, concerns, and other feedback promptly throughout the planning process;*
- *Engaging participants in discussion of potential short, medium, and long-range impacts with a focus on the benefits of a particular project or plan;*
- *Responding to comments in writing when applicable, including documenting public comments received in the final plan.*
- *Incorporating data visualization platforms into planning and public participation processes, including dashboards and interactive mapping;*
- *Avoiding stilted or technocratic jargon to the greatest extent possible in all mediums of communication;*
- *Creating targeted communications to avoid off-topic responses;*
- *Leading with simple and clear questions to make participants feel at ease*

Public input opportunities into a transportation plan should be timely.

Traditional public comment periods and public hearings on final drafts of plans and studies often fail to engage stakeholders in setting outcomes. To be meaningful, public engagement activities must be timely, occurring early enough in the process to influence the outcome with additional opportunities for participation throughout the process.

The RVTPO can support timely participation by providing:

- *Accurate information which supports planning activities for all stakeholders*
- *Access to technical and policy information that has been used in the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Plan, and other planning projects, where practicable; Technical documents will be hosted on the RVTPO website chronologically based on publication date.*
- *Adequate notice of all opportunities for public participation, including workshops, public hearings, surveys, and social media.*

Objective 2: High-quality

When participants understand the transportation planning process, they can actively participate and provide input that is relevant, thoughtful, and practical.

The RVTPO can support high quality participation by providing:

- *A solution-oriented approach that emphasizes practical strategies to promote enhanced quality of life, protect the environment, and facilitate efficient mobility.*
- *Background and historical context on the planning process, including results from related or prior planning efforts and the origins of project ideas.*
- *Clarity of purpose and expectations for outcomes throughout the planning process.*
- *Opportunities for lateral communication between citizens and staff or citizens and elected officials which elevates shared values and respectful discourse over an emphasis on difference.*
- *On-going evaluation of public participation processes to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and commit to implementing best practices in future planning activities.*

Objective 3: Representative Input

The RVTPO seeks a variety of public input that is representative of the various communities in the region.

Engaging a broad, representative audience requires a proactive, comprehensive approach throughout the planning process. Traditional approaches, like simply hosting meetings or distributing surveys, are unlikely to attract broad or representative participation. Furthermore, these methods are unlikely to attract those who have not previously participated. A comprehensive strategy combining new mechanisms of engagement, including virtual options, with more traditional practices would encompass the following activities:

The RVTPO can ensure broad participation through:

- *Cultivating and broadening relationships with neighborhood, civic, and other community organizations and encouraging their participation in planning activities;*

- While building and sustaining these relationships are difficult to scale and require significant time commitments, meaningful networking with civic organizations makes the solicitation of input and the dissemination of information easier.
- Analysis of participation rates and trends to identify key demographics with low levels of participation;
- Targeted outreach to individuals or groups with low levels of participation;
- Utilizing an array of formats and methods of engagement, including a mix of virtual and traditional methods.
- Placing equal emphasis on all modes of transportation and their respective users;
- Improving coordination with localities to widely distribute dates for upcoming public engagement activities;
- Leveraging traditional print media by embedding a project link or survey into articles of interest to readers, such as an article about a new project designed to reduce congestion.
 - Media releases can also be distributed to local and regional television and radio.
 - Topics for releases will include meeting notices and transportation planning updates.



Objective 4: Accessible

The RVTPO will provide convenient and accessible opportunities to foster greater public participation.

Expanding opportunities for participation will require the implementation of innovative engagement strategies, including mobile-friendly formats. Efforts to utilize tools like text surveys have the potential to engage stakeholders who lack access to a computer or cannot attend public meetings and hearings. Survey data from the Pew Research Center released in January 2024 reveals that 97% of Americans own a cellphone, of which 90% are smartphones. 15% of U.S. adults are “smart-phone” only internet users who lack broadband access.⁹ Supplementing traditional engagement tools with mobile-friendly options would broaden engagement from underrepresented groups, including younger adults and lower-income citizens who have not traditionally participated in RVTPO planning activities.

The RVTPO can promote convenient participation through:

- *Development of multiple ‘touch points’ throughout the planning process, including in-person meetings, focus groups, workshops, and public hearings;*
- *Promoting surveys and participation opportunities through the newspaper, and social media, including paid social media ads;*
 - *Survey capabilities:*
 - *Access to multiple survey platforms*
 - *Digital and paper versions*
 - *Mapping or budgeting exercises*
 - *Ranking or scoring projects, priorities, or objectives*
- *Frequent updates to meeting notices, calendars, and agendas on the RVTPO website;*

⁹ Pew Research Survey available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/?tabId=tab-d40cde3f-c455-4f0e-9be0-0aefcdaee00>

- *Distribution of materials to community centers including libraries, and government offices, and mailed for targeted engagements;*
- *Monitoring emerging participation techniques and technologies and identifying opportunities for implementation;*
- *Enhancing translation capabilities on the RVTPO website for non-English speakers.*

Technology Integration

Staff should continue to develop and implement a systems-based approach to capturing and retaining data from all planning and engagement processes. Public Input, a developer of community engagement platforms,¹⁰ recommends a model that will consistently store contacts, input, and context to facilitate efficient, future participation. This database should be integrated with all public involvement communication channels. This level of robust interconnectivity will reduce duplication of efforts and reliance on disjointed platforms.



Final Comment Period and Public Hearing

The final comment period and public hearing are the last chance for public input before plan adoption. The Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, the Public Participation Plan, and major amendments to these *must* include a final comment period and public hearing. Other plans, studies, and key decision points may include a public comment period or public hearing as well.

Because the projects listed in the Transportation Improvement Program are typically also included in the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan with early and continuous opportunity for public input, a final comment period and a public hearing are sufficient public input opportunities for the Transportation Improvement Program. If the Transportation Improvement Program is significantly different than the

¹⁰ Public Input, “Integrated Public Involvement: The MPO Guide to Best Practices Across Traditional and Virtual Methods,” Available: <https://publicinput.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Integrated-Public-Involvement-An-MPO-Best-Practice-Guide.pdf>

Fiscally Constrained List of Projects in the Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan, a more extensive process will be followed.

1. The comment period will be 45 days for the Public Participation Plan and at least 14 days for other plans.
2. Hold a public hearing on the draft, with provisions upon request to allow people with visual or hearing impairment or limited English proficiency to participate.
3. Advertise the comment period and public hearing on the web page and Facebook before the beginning of the comment period and at least 7 days in advance of the public hearing. Newspaper ads are not an effective way to reach people, but Virginia state law requires that local governments publish newspaper ads for public hearings for funding allocation decisions. Newspaper ads, when used, should be published in the Roanoke Times and the Roanoke Tribune.

Evaluation of Public Participation Activities

The RVTPO should continuously evaluate and improve its public participation activities to enhance stakeholder efficacy in the planning process. Continuous evaluation should be embedded throughout all engagement activities, from content and strategy development through implementation of participation activities, and finally, an analysis of outcomes. Asking participants how they experienced an engagement activity can inform the design of future activities. Guided by a spirit of continuous improvement, the RVTPO will evaluate by measuring outcomes.

The following model can be used to measure the effectiveness of the RVTPO’s public engagement activities. Examples are provided in the table below:

Outreach Activity	Indicator of Success	Improvements
Email	Number of meaningful responses	On-going maintenance of email database
Paid Advertisement/Public Notices	Attendance and comments at public hearings	Consistent with statutory requirements, identify the most prominent media for advertisement in addition to new local media sites with growing readership and regional footprint
Surveys	Number of completed surveys and utility of responses	On-going maintenance of database; Evaluation of data quality
Meetings with civic associations/neighborhood groups	Quantity/Quality of Meetings Increase in participation by organization	Compare the time spent in meetings with the corresponding response

Public Meetings	Number of participants and meaningful comments from the public	Compare the time spent on coordinating the meeting and the quality of participation and interest
Pop up Booth	Number of interactions Quality of interactions	Location and time of events to enhance visibility
Social Media	Number of 'follows' or 'likes'	Evaluation of reach and adaptation to new technologies
Blog Posts	Number of responses or views to a blog post	Compare development time with visibility/audience reach
Newsletters	Number of open emails or signing up for distribution list Number of comments or questions from newsletter readers	Evaluation of subjects, length, etc. that receive the most engagement

Appendix 1 Development of the Public Participation Plan

The RVTPO sought extensive public collaboration in developing the initial Public Participation Plan in 2018.

Public Participation Plan Ad-hoc Committee

The Public Participation Plan Ad-hoc Committee extended invitations to 82 agencies and individuals representing:

- RVTPO member jurisdictions and agencies
- Business interests
- Economic development
- Communications and marketing
- Environmental protection
- Environmental justice
- Transportation
- Freight
- Safety & emergency management
- Health
- Education
- Housing
- Transportation workers

Thirty-eight people from thirty agencies attended at least one meeting, and several others provided feedback. The committee met six times between May 8 and Oct 23, 2017. During this time, the committee:

- Reviewed public participation plans from eleven MPOs

- Identified agencies and demographic groups missing from the table, and assisted staff in reaching out to them
- Learned about the transportation planning process and opportunities for public participation
- Drafted public participation Purpose and Objectives
- Provided feedback on survey questions to capture public input on the Purpose and Objectives
- Brainstormed and discussed public participation tools concerning the Purpose and Objectives
- Provided feedback on the draft Plan
- Responded to feedback from the Transportation Technical Committee on the draft Plan

Minutes from these meetings are available on request.

The RVTPO thanks the members of the committee for their hard work in developing this plan:

<i>Dee King, Chair</i>	<i>City of Salem citizen representative</i>
<i>Ben Bristol, Vice Chair</i>	<i>City of Roanoke citizen representative</i>
John Busher	Botetourt County citizen representative
Tim Martin	City of Roanoke business representative
alternate Melinda Mayo	
Bruce Mayer	Vinton business representative
Carl Palmer	Valley Metro
Kevin Jones	Federal Highway Administration
Olivia Byrd	Grandin Village Business Association
Wendy Jones	Williamson Road Area Business Association
Michael Shelton	Brambleton Area Business Association
Josh Baumgartner	Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce
Morgan Romeo	Western Virginia Workforce Development Board
Landon Howard	Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge
Amar Bhattarai	Refugee and Immigration Services
Bethany Lackey	Roanoke Refugee Partnership
Aaron Fallon	Total Action for Progress
Antwyne Calloway	Blue Ridge Independent Living Center
Michelle Via	Roanoke Area Visually Enabled
Kim Gembala	Roanoke Rescue Mission
Shawn Hunter	The Peacemakers, Inc.
Paul Workman	Blue Ridge Bicycle Club
Liz Belcher	Greenway Commission
Jeremy Holmes	Ride Solutions
alternate Tim Pohlada-Thomas	
Robert Stutes	Uber
David Foster	Rail Solution
James Humanik	Fetch
Marci Stone	Roanoke City Emergency Manager
Aaron Boush	Carilion
alternates Sierra Steffan, Amy Michals	
Sean Pressman	Lewis Gale
Stacie Turner	Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare
Forest Jones	Salem Public Schools
alternate Lewis Armistead	
Crystal Hall	Roanoke Housing Authority
Wayne Leftwich	City of Roanoke

Public Input

In addition to the contributions of the committee, there were multiple opportunities for public input. Two surveys sought input on the newly developed Purpose and Objectives early in the development of the draft. A 45-day public comment period and a public hearing were opportunities for final comments on the draft. The comments and responses, early and late, are available at <https://rvarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Public-input-summary.pdf> or by request.

Triennial Updates

2021

In 2021, staff conducted a public input survey which resulted in minor changes to the 2018 plan. These changes are outlined below:

- Updated contact information (page i).
- Reorganization:
 - “2. Purpose and Objectives of Public Participation” is now simply “2. Purpose and Objectives”.
 - Objectives are now second-level headings, so they appear in the table of contents.
 - Removed “2.2 Public Participation Strategies” which was redundant with other sections.
 - “2.3 Toolbox” (under “2. Purpose and Objectives of Public Participation”) is now “3. Toolbox”.
 - “2.4 Evaluation Guidelines of Public Participation Efforts” (under “2. Purpose and Objectives of Public Participation”) is now “4. Evaluation”.
- Rephrased “key decision points” which was confusing (Table 1 and throughout).
- Updated the planning factors to match 23 CFR 450.306 (page 9).
- Removed Figure 3 and “Public participation permeates the planning process” from the description of the long-range transportation plan because there are many planning steps that the public does not participate in (page 11).
- Revised the description of the Transportation Improvement Program to explain that the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation makes funding decisions one year out while the Virginia Department of Transportation makes a six-year improvement plan (page 12).
- Objective 1 changed the bow-tie model to a more accurate statement about timeliness (page 14).
- Updated Objective 4, High Quantity to reflect recent RVTPO experience with public input (pages 17-18).
- Clarified Final Comment Period and Public Hearing section (page 18) to allow flexibility in the event that state law changes regarding the requirement of newspaper ads.
- Removed items that were not successful and updated details on items based on RVTPO recent experience with public participation in section 3. Toolbox (formerly section 2.3) (pages 19-20).
- Changed the 15-day requirement, which was effectively a 21-day requirement because newspaper ads must be submitted a week in advance, to 14 days (page 23).
- Replaced Appendix material, Title VI and Limited English Proficiency, with the most recent Title VI Implementation Plan. (The Title VI Implementation was updated in 2019 and amended March 25, 2021 to correct deficiencies identified during a compliance review from the Virginia Department of Transportation.)

2024

As part of its triennial update, staff conducted a public participation plan survey to explore civic participation, media consumption habits, and overall familiarity with the mission and activities of the RVTPO. The results of the survey were incorporated into the 2024 update. A special subcommittee of the Transportation Technical Committee provided feedback on the draft update before consideration by the RVTPO Policy Board.

The results of the survey, which was conducted March 1 – March 14, 2014, are in Appendix 2

Updates to the 2024 Public Participation Plan include:

- Revised Introduction
- New section on Transportation Funding
- Updated map of the RVTPO planning area
- Description of RVTPO committees and work-groups
- Revisions to the section on purposes and objectives
- Revisions to the section on Public Participation Strategies
- New section on evaluation

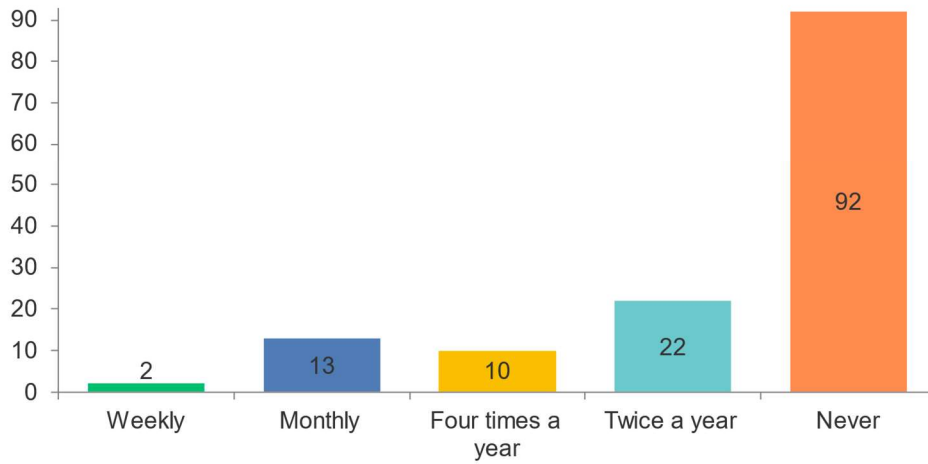
Appendix 2 Summary of Public Participation Plan Survey Results (March 2024)

The Public Participation Plan Survey was accessible from March 1st through March 14th. The survey was distributed with paid social media advertisements, stakeholder lists, the RVARC website, and the Roanoke County Community Development newsletter. The survey included 15 questions and received 140 responses, a 95% completion rate, and an average time spent 3 minutes and 18 seconds. The social media advertisements received 15,038 reach or impressions (chances to see the advertisement) and 276 clicks, most participation yielded from mobile in-stream video and mobile app feeds.

The results of the survey determined that a sizeable majority of respondents are not regular participants at local meetings. They are generally more engaged with community-oriented groups, but many do not participate regularly. There were identified barriers regarding lack of information, interest, or accessibility in participating, half identified barriers while the other half stated they experienced no barriers to participation. The respondents engage with various forms of media and news (digital, print, audio) weekly but the highest usage of social media platforms. Most respondents use mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, handheld devices) to access news. In the past 12 months, most respondents saw transportation-related news, posts, and articles weekly or monthly. Most respondents had previously participated in RVTPO activities including surveys, attending RVTPO Policy Board meetings, attending public meetings or workshops, or reviewing planning documents through the RVARC website or social media platforms. Most of the respondents preferred online surveys, community meetings or events, or public hearings for sharing feedback on transportation topics.

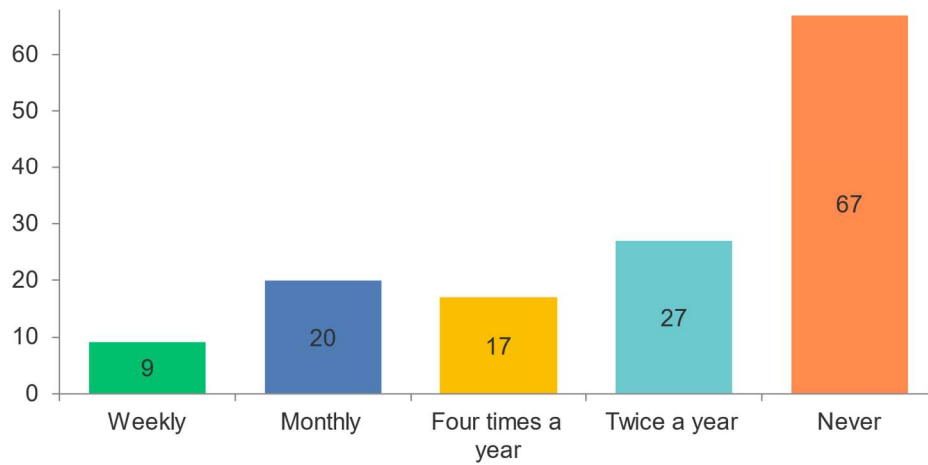
Q1: How often do you attend local government meetings, such as a city council, board of supervisors, planning commission or school board meeting?

Answered: 139 Skipped: 1



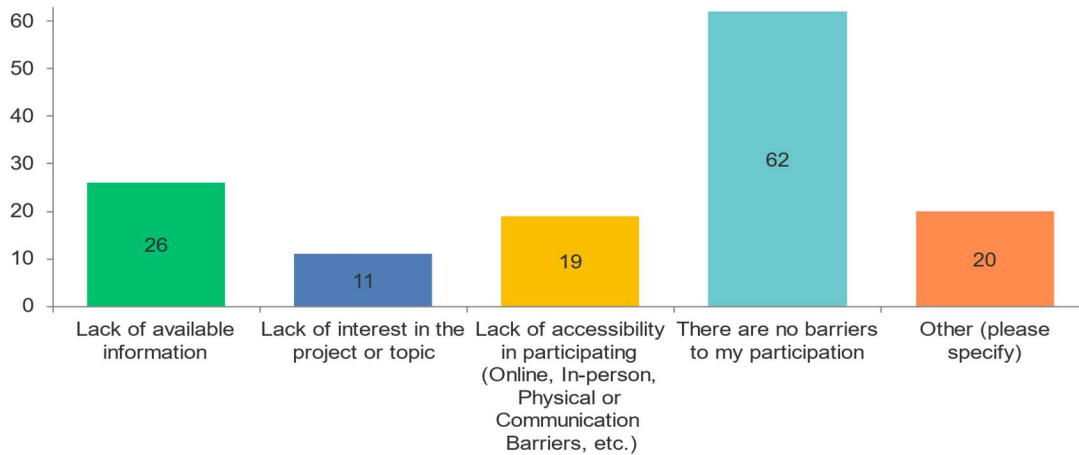
Q2: How frequently do you participate with civic or community organizations such as neighborhood associations or Rotary Club?

Answered: 140 Skipped: 0



Q3: What barriers limit your ability to share your viewpoint or opinion with a governing body, included Elected Officials, planning commissions, or community groups?

Answered: 138 Skipped: 2

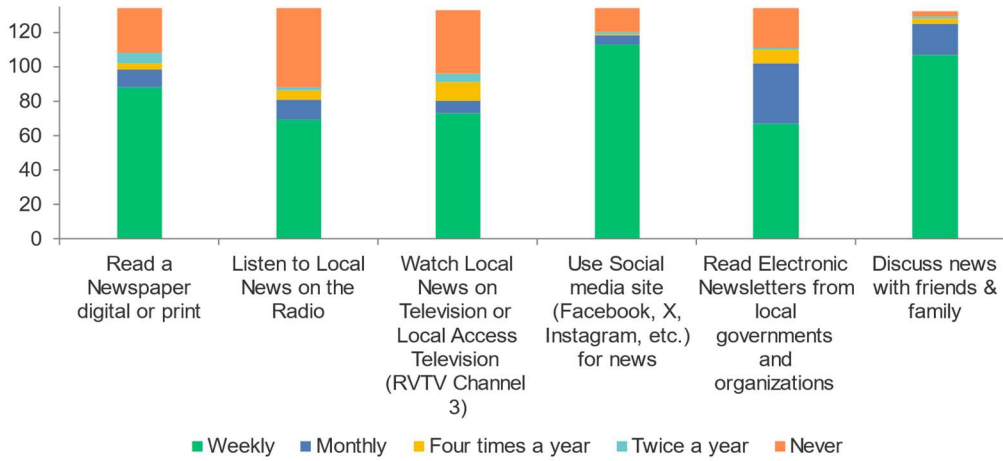


#3 Written responses:

Fear of retaliation from the local right wing extremists and politicians.
Can't drive due to medical reasons.
New to the area
Timing
Elected officials do not care a bit about what citizens think about issues. The elected officials do whatever they want, regardless of public opinion.
It doesn't seem to matter what the citizens say
Short notice, public invited too far into decision process
Timing and formality
They don't REALLY listen!
Feel like nobody will listen
Due to job, I am limited in what I can say (neutrality)
My locality, Botetourt County, likes to hold their meetings at 2 pm in the daytime when everyone is working. Probably not an accident this time was chosen. Not everyone can afford to take off in the middle of the day to attend a meeting where they don't even give you much if any time to speak your mind. The last meeting on February 27th was a train wreck. I know because my retired husband attended and it was just awful how the citizens were treated by Board members. Some citizens were able to take off work to go and wanted to speak but were not afforded the opportunity. This needs to change. They should hold meetings after 5:30 pm and if no one shows up so be it, if 100 people show up great. But citizens deserve a fair chance to be heard at a time that is convenient for them not the board.
My biggest barrier is time. My full time work schedule hours don't seem to match up with meeting with planning commissions and community groups. They have afternoon or 5:00 start times. I work until 6pm.
lack of time in my schedule
Lack of time to research everything and then attend meetings
Time/day of meetings
I have had a stroke and my ability to travel is limited
We are senior citizens and one of us has health problems that limit being able to attend and participate in person. We do read agendas and minutes posted online for meetings of various governmental and civic groups and organizations and try to respond online to surveys.
Outnumber 5 to 1 by republicans in Craig Co.
I am local government personnel.

Q4: How often do you?

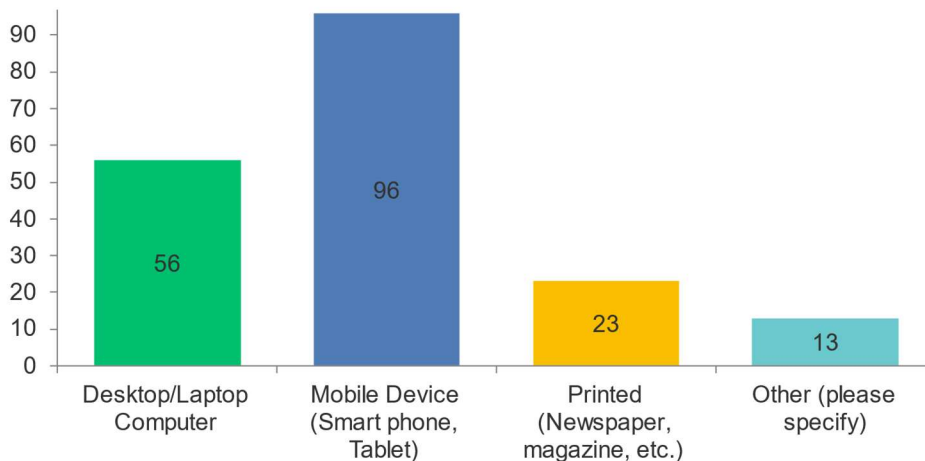
Answered: 134 Skipped: 6



#4 Written Responses:
Daily
Daily
Radio—npr local and national daily
Magazines
I actually do many of these daily
Daily
We do these activities daily
Almost daily

Q5: What medium do you prefer to access news?

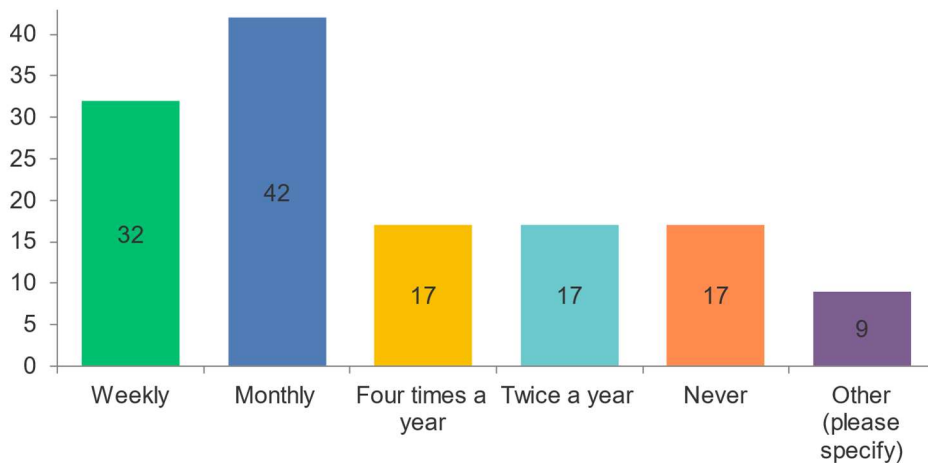
Answered: 134 Skipped: 6



#5 Written Responses:
Television
Tv
Website
Radio
digital newspaper
television
All of the above
Radio
Local TV news
TV
combination of all the above
TV, mobile device
I try to avoid the news

Q6: In the past 12 months, how often did you see news, posts, articles or information regarding transportation projects in the community?

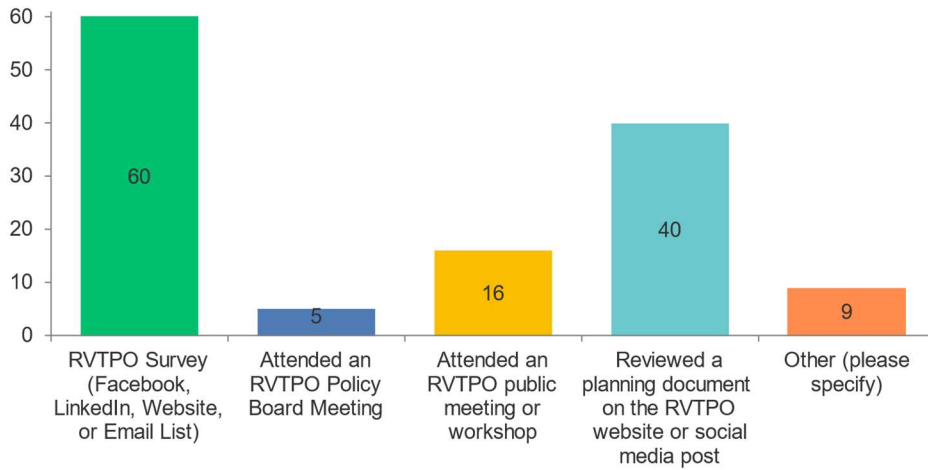
Answered: 134 Skipped: 6



#6 Written Responses:
Occasionally
Once or twice
Not sure
Seldom because little happens in my area
Not sure but definitely saw the news about late night bus service in Rke, Greyhound pulling out of new transportation building, bike lane improvements, bridge prject, etc.
As needed
Rarely. Probably more than twice a year, but rarely.
Occasionally

Q7: Have you previously participated in any of the RVTPO activities below?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 47

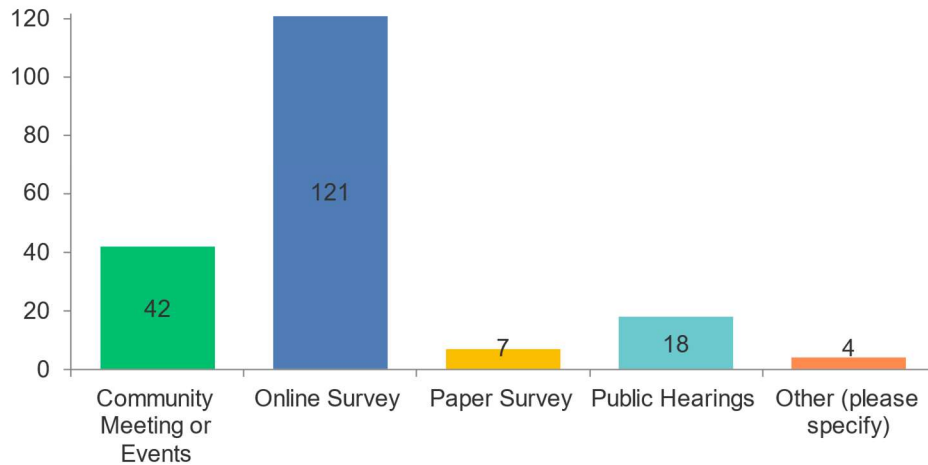


#7 Written Responses:

None
No I have not
None of the above
Have participated in other city projects. Not transportation, except Wasena bridge project and volunteer-led safety projects with hope of engaging city support
No
None
I have taken surveys in previous years and have supported efforts
No this is this first time participating
I have not participated

Q8: How would you like to share feedback on local transportation topics?

Answered: 130 Skipped: 10



#8 Written Responses:

Come to present at our regular Old Southwest neighborhood meetings

Pop-up events

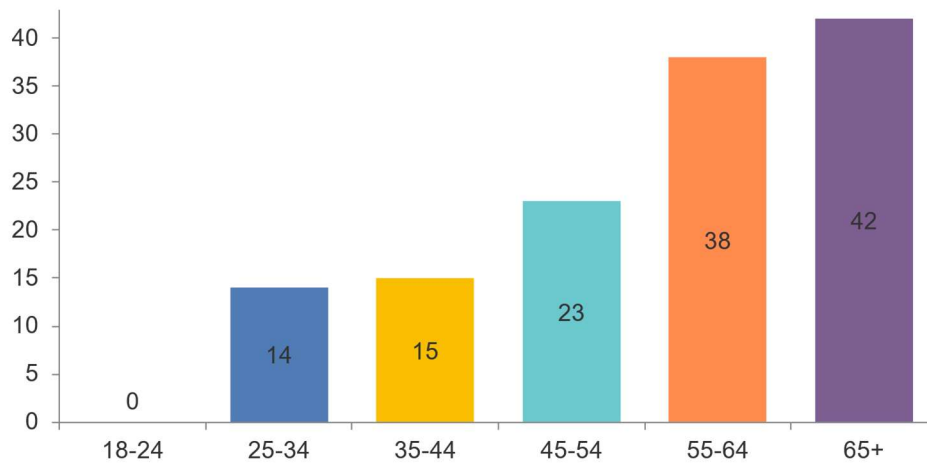
If a meeting, a daytime meeting that is handicap accessible.

email

Question 10: Most respondents were in the 55-63 and 65 and up age bracket.

Q10: What is your age?

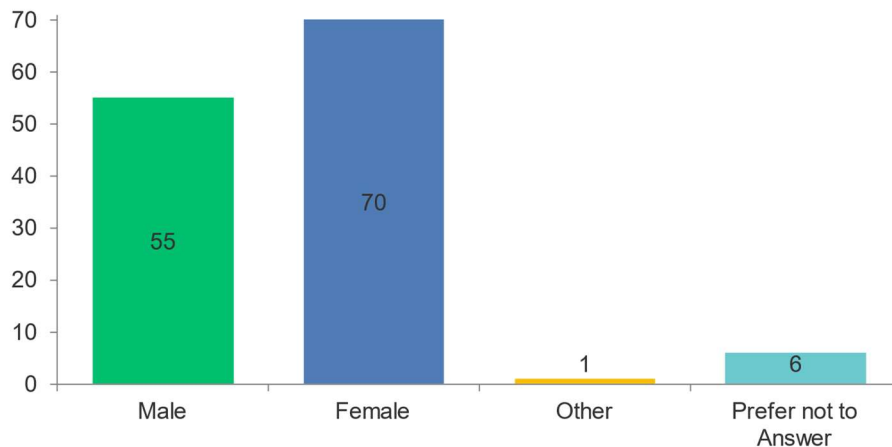
Answered: 132 Skipped: 8



Question 11: More female respondents.

Q11: What is your gender?

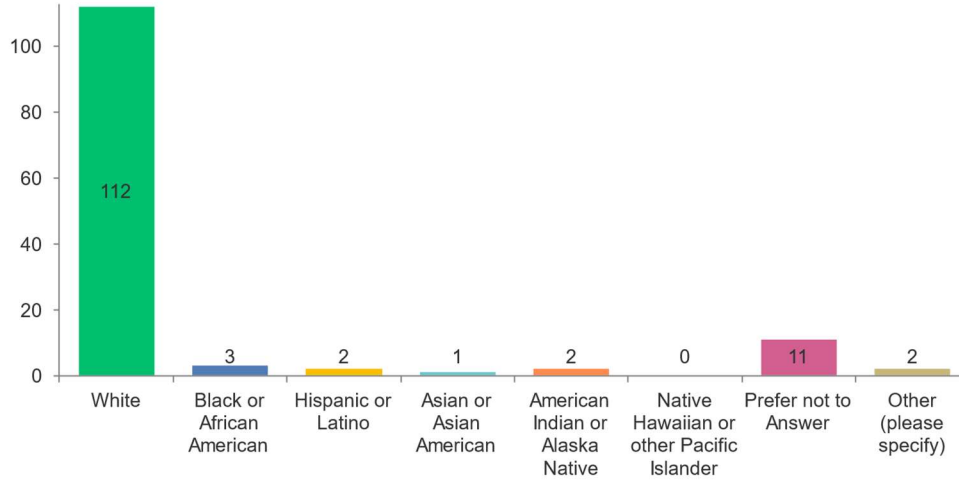
Answered: 132 Skipped: 8



Question 12: Most respondents identified as white.

Q12: What is your Race/Ethnicity?

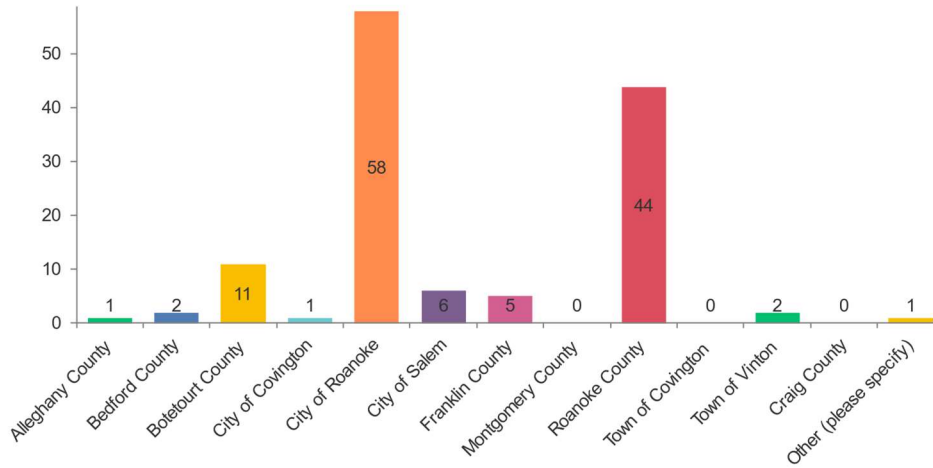
Answered: 132 Skipped: 8



Question 13: Highest participating localities in order: City of Roanoke, Roanoke County, and Botetourt County.

Q13: What locality do you reside?

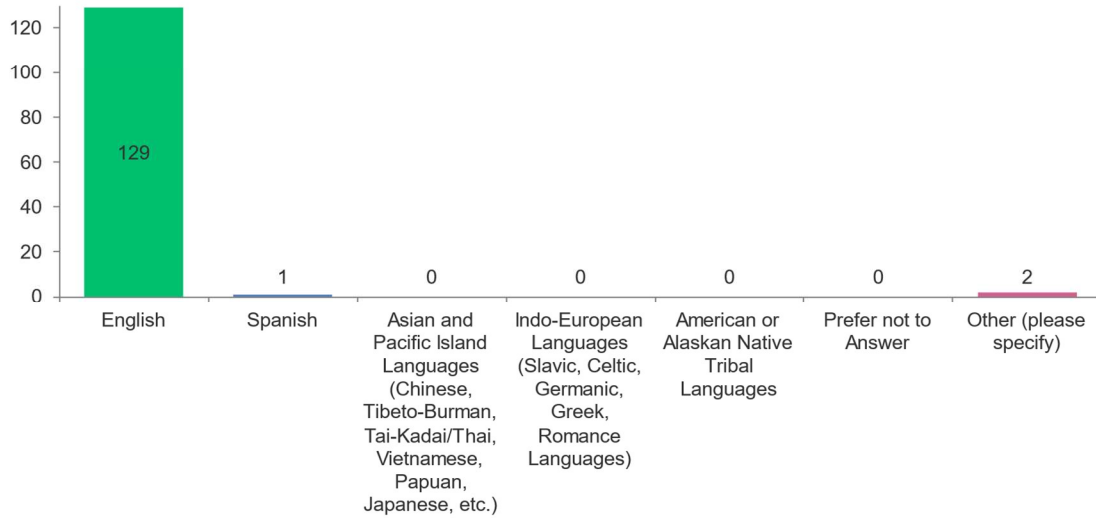
Answered: 131 Skipped: 9



Question 14: English was the majority first language.

Q14: What is your first language?

Answered: 132 Skipped: 8



Question 15: The household income bracket with the largest participation was from \$75,000 to \$99,999 and \$100,000 to \$149,999.

Q15: What is your household income?

Answered: 132 Skipped: 8

