Sacramento Transportation Listening Tour

From Outreach to Engagement: Stakeholder Input on Transportation Issues in Sacramento County

PREPARED FOR:
SACRAMENTO COUNTY AND CITY OF SACRAMENTO

LISTENING TOUR REPORT PREPARED BY:
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INTRODUCTION

In June 2018, the County of Sacramento and City of Sacramento launched a transportation listening tour throughout Sacramento County to better understand how to work with stakeholders in a challenging infrastructure funding environment requiring two-thirds voter approval. Over the course of a year, more than 300 individuals representing 107 Sacramento County-based organizations participated in 35 community-based stakeholder listening sessions. Meetings were hosted by neighborhood associations, business groups, elected officials, transportation advocacy organizations, community groups, labor organizations, chambers of commerce, universities, and regional organizations.

The goal of the community listening tour was to investigate and provide policymakers with foundational insights into the perspectives of cross-sector stakeholders relative to public involvement in developing transportation ballot measures in Sacramento County. The primary message from these individuals and organizations was that the listening tour was a critical step in improving the transportation planning process. Additionally, Sacramento County, the cities within the county, the Sacramento Transportation Authority (STA), and other agencies should continue to refine and expand their ability to effectively engage with a broad base of community stakeholders.

This report captures the ideas and recommendations of participants on how to strengthen public input procedures on transportation issues and how to better engage with a diverse cross section of community groups. Doing so will better reflect the values and aspirations of the residents who participate in the civic process by voting, or not voting, in transportation revenue elections.

Following the November 2016 failure of Measure B to increase the Sacramento County sales tax by half a percent to fund transportation projects, public officials began to assess why, despite garnering more than 65% voter support, the initiative could not achieve the required two-third voter approval. Officials from City of Sacramento, County of Sacramento, and STA launched an analysis of how to better connect with residents on establishing funding priorities for local transportation issues.

The consultant team, KMP Strategies LLC, researched successful transportation funding efforts such as the resounding 71.15% approval of Measure M by Los Angeles County voters, a no sunset transportation finance initiative. Sacramento officials determined that the success in Los Angeles and other areas, including the Seattle metropolitan area, was a result of strong commitment to long-term public engagement with local communities and the development of a process for drawing on the expertise and insight of stakeholders.

Sacramento officials learned from other counties that their leaders identified the key to success as developing a more systematic outreach process to identify themes, projects, and policies that were important to a diverse group of community-based stakeholders and consistently engaging with organizations and individuals to examine and prioritize those projects. Through collective engagement over time, Los Angeles and Seattle developed project lists and spending plans rooted in the local communities and supported by broad constituencies. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) has subsequently published the story of their engagement process as: How to Pass a Mega Transportation Measure - LA County’s Measure M Lessons Learned.

The Los Angeles Measure M initiative is part of a growing body of evidence that indicates that successful transportation funding, requires engaging in what the leaders of the Measure M campaign call a “bottom up” approach to public outreach. A bottom up process is defined as identifying a broad group of community-based organizations throughout the region where transportation funding is needed and creating mechanisms to encourage them to participate in collectively identifying the priority projects and shaping the proposed funding effort.
Many local government experts, including the California Institute for Local Government (ILG), refer to this bottom up process as moving from outreach to engagement or as moving up the spectrum of public participation to include public involvement and collaboration in the process of developing public policy. The benefits of this enhanced public engagement process include more informed residents, improved local agency decision making, higher rates of community participation, increased communication and trust among stakeholders throughout a community, and more sustainable problem solving.

The input provided during the recent transportation listening tour can serve as a starting point for helping refine and improve those practices that have historically served the residents of Sacramento County and the cities within well. The Lessons Learned can serve as a foundation for an effort to encourage the evolution of public participation in transportation policy making from outreach to engagement.
Summary of Listening Tour Process

For local policymakers, the failure of Measure B to gain two-thirds support in Sacramento County was an opportunity to learn how to do things differently. The development of the 2018-2019 transportation listening tour was an effort to test a deeper and more inclusive process than many past efforts. The goal was to hold accessible sessions throughout the county to solicit input from a diverse group of local stakeholders. To investigate current stakeholder perceptions on civic outreach, the consultant team outlined a three-step process to engage more deeply with transportation stakeholders in cities and unincorporated county sub-regions:

- Development of a stakeholder contact list and data base of at least 750 organizations, community groups, and engaged county residents, to facilitate consistent and ongoing communication with interested stakeholders.
- A county-wide listening tour including one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, small group presentations and listening sessions, and a series of community conversations grounded in two-way dialogue on transportation issues to solicit input on how to improve stakeholder outreach.
- An online outreach and survey effort to elicit input and communication beyond the stakeholder database and those who were unable to attend events.

This three-step process built on the lessons learned in Seattle and Los Angeles in engaging with local communities. Those previous efforts indicated that to move from simply informing the public of decisions made by technical transportation experts to ongoing engagement was a long-term process that required listening to the residents of local communities and incorporating their concerns and ideas into the development of a larger transportation planning effort.

From the point of view of both the facilitators and the participants, the year-long listening tour was a success. There is clearly still room for improvement of the public engagement process, but multiple times participants indicated in their own words what one community member described the best way to gather meaningful public input as: “Do what you are doing, talking to people and getting input.” Another participant described what they had felt with some past outreach efforts: “It seemed in the past that no one listened, that everyone was busy telling us what to do and what was right. It felt like it was happening to us, not with us.”

The listening tour process was designed to change that perception and encourage diverse members of the community to speak their mind and be heard. The open-ended format of the listening tour encouraged vigorous dialogue and allowed the public official facilitators to listen to stakeholders throughout the county. A degree of informality allowed facilitators to probe into the meanings and ideas behind some of the participants’ initial responses. The online research allowed thousands outside the core stakeholder group to hear about the process and decide whether to add their voice to the conversation by participating in an accessible online poll.

In debriefs of the process, local and county officials expressed gratitude for the format which allowed them to hear directly from residents in local communities rather than through the filter of professional engineering and transportation policy staff. The immediacy of the engagement with how stakeholders talked about the transportation issues important to them provided a valuable new lens into understanding community funding priorities and opened a bridge to developing even stronger public engagement processes in the future.
Local governments throughout California are applying a variety of public engagement strategies and approaches to address issues ranging from land use and budgeting to climate change and public safety. They are discovering a number of benefits that can result from the successful engagement of their residents in local decision making. A public engagement tip sheet developed by the Institute for Local Government (ILG) describes eight benefits of an ongoing, two-way public engagement process. When the process succeeds and the local agency takes the ideas and recommendations of the public seriously, perhaps the greatest benefit is the development of trust.

“Whatever their differences, people who work together on common problems usually have more appreciation of the problem and of each other. Many forms of public engagement provide opportunity to get behind peoples’ statements and understand the reasons for what they think and say. This helps enhance understanding and respect among the participants. It also inspires confidence that problems can be solved – which promotes more cooperation over time.”
During the course of the listening tour, participants offered a wide array of recommendations, ideas, and concerns about how to work with stakeholder communities on developing transportation funding priorities that would be subjected to a public vote. Whether they were responding to questions about transportation priorities or giving meaningful public input, or why Measure B failed to garner two-thirds support, comments reflected the day-to-day concerns of the participants.

Some participants were able to characterize their ideas and suggestions in terms of general themes and methods for enhancing civic participation in a process to devise collective solutions, but many of the recommendations were as specific and diverse as the participants. Recommendations often focused on very specific local issues or problems that strongly resonated with the individual participants.

Advice was given on which social media networks specific communities utilized or where people in a neighborhood would be comfortable meeting. Some with children emphasized the importance of communicating through the schools. Others with busy schedules and/or long commutes focused on electronic communication and automated reminders. But, no matter what idea for better public engagement a participant articulated, there were three important words that consistently came to the surface: trust, transparency, and accessibility.

The three terms are intimately entwined in the perception of participants. Making the opportunities for public participation more accessible builds trust. Through repeated efforts to establish an open and transparent process for engagement, trust grows throughout the community. When there is greater trust of the engagement process, community members are more willing to participate. Working at the local level in assessing projects makes the resources needed clearer and more transparent. Connecting local issues to the bigger picture builds trust. The connections definitely continue from there. One clear message from these three connected concepts is that any improved outreach or engagement process will need to help build mutual trust between public officials and community members.

There are no quick and simple paths to strengthening and sustaining trust in a community. At the county or regional level, the complexity is multiplied. Those who have analyzed Measure M in Los Angeles were clear that building trust through consistent two-way dialogue in diverse communities across the region was critical to building the trust needed to pass a transportation sales tax increase that did not have a sunset provision. Participants in the Sacramento County listening tour were equally clear that trust will be equally important to the success of any future efforts locally.

The listening tour feedback on methods for engaging the public is gathered in the Platforms for Public Outreach section. The underlying themes behind those recommendations speak to how public engagement can be made more effective and when participants will develop trust. One consistent framework from listening tour participants was that local officials and decisionmakers should emphasize a “bottom up approach.” Many considered that approach integral to the success of Los Angeles’ Measure M, but there was not a consistent definition of either the term bottom up or common understanding of Measure M in the materials gathered from the listening tour.

There were several broad themes articulated by participants about how to better encourage collaborative public engagement that embodies the core principles of “bottom up” public engagement. Each theme is discussed under a phrase drawn from the record of the 35 listening tour sessions.
“What’s in it for me?”

This lesson may sound selfish, but it is simply self-interested. Participants consistently indicated that stakeholder perception and understanding of the specific local benefits or returns of a transportation funding measure was critical.

The process begins with creating a local list of projects with stakeholders in a particular community. It continues with demonstrating how those projects fit with projects from other communities. Public finance is a mystery to most residents. The specific impact of dollars and how they are invested in specific communities helps residents understand what they are getting for their tax dollars. The online poll clearly indicated that respondents want investment to be made based on local need.

When community stakeholders feel they are speaking for themselves and influencing the process and the decisions they are engaging in bottom up input for their community. As one participant put it: “People want to vote on improvements in their neighborhoods.”

Participants in the listening tour also recommend that funding agencies monitor and report ongoing expenditures in a fashion that allows residents to track the progress of projects in their neighborhoods. Recommendations included websites and real-time maps to make local impacts clear.

“Listen to the community”

Listening tour participants clearly indicated their preference for developing a collective list of projects that would become the framework for a new plan of geographically equitable transportation projects throughout the county. They were also clear that this was not the result of one meeting where experts submit choices for community input, but of an ongoing process of engagement that had significant give and take.

Transportation is a process that is never complete and refining the transportation infrastructure needs is an equally ongoing process. Local community input can steer planners in the right direction and help provide ongoing guidance to solving problems.

Community members feel listened to when there is a willingness to explore new ideas and the available input and data is used to generate new options. Those engaged on an issue want to see some impact or action from their participation even if their ideas are not directly adopted.
“Have fundamental conversations”

Dialogue among equals, including the willingness to engage in constructive conflict, is at the core of successful two-way communication. Sitting down face-to-face to have a dialogue allows ideas to emerge that often stay hidden without the process of input, consultation and collaboration.

Everyone has a limited capacity to engage on policy discussions. Most people want to have meaningful exchanges on issues they consider vital to their lives. They want to be heard. And, they want to explore the ideas raised in the dialogue.

Almost all of the listening sessions opened up new avenues for investigation about how to best assess transportation funding needs. Some of those ideas are captured in the Questions for Further Research section.

Those ideas emerged because the facilitators were open to stepping back from the immediate set of questions in the interview instrument and allowing participants to articulate deeper concerns and connections than might have been envisioned during listening tour planning.

“Make the process more fun”

Finding the time to participate in developing public policy is difficult for most county residents. When the process is dry and abstract it becomes even harder to save time for civic participation. By creating a more welcoming, comfortable, and accessible process, planners can help expand most people’s limited capacity to engage on policy discussions.

Listening tour facilitators were told that the low-key, casual approach to the listening tour meetings helped make the process easier to engage in and an enjoyable experience. Yes, participants felt heard, but just as important they felt more energized than enervated by the sessions.

There were multiple listening tour meetings that offered open and transparent opportunities to engage consistently and repeatedly over many months. The listening tour sessions were not exactly a night out at a comedy club, but they were a place where participants could engage with neighbors and colleagues in dynamic dialogues about important local and regional issues.

Clever but accurate forms of information packaging are essential to finding new ways to reach residents with accessible data. There were many suggestions about greater utilization of online maps and interactive data to help make it easier to find local projects and more fun to discover how projects will impact neighborhoods.
“Improve the use of technology”

The listening tour was a relatively low-tech approach to public engagement, especially given the high level of technology available to coordinate transportation planning and policy. This was a conscious decision of the planning team.

Clearly, listening tour participants believe that in the long run, the effective utilization of the most advanced digital technologies including the internet and smart phones, as well as older media is vital to the ongoing education and engagement of county residents in transportation issues.

According to participants, technology can be particularly useful in:

- clarifying financial impacts in local communities
- explaining how dollars raised in a proposed local funding measure will leverage additional funds from other sources
- exploring projected traffic and congestion patterns
- giving residents a real-time mechanism for assessing the ability of those implementing transportation projects to meet projected timelines and budgets.

Many suggested that technology is not only a public engagement tool, but a vital tool to solving some of the disconnections between modes of transit including ride shares, light rail, buses, and personal cars.

“Find new ways to reach residents”

Not everyone wants to attend a public meeting to discuss policy issues. And, even among those who might want to attend, there are multiple obstacles to engaging in person: work commitments, family responsibilities, illness, vacation, and, not surprisingly in a congested county, traffic.

In the online poll, it was clear that while respondents believe community meetings are the most meaningful and important way to provide input, most participants reported that they are most willing to visit an agency website.

People are aware that engaging in-person may be the most effective way of communicating their concerns but going online and typing a message is faster and easier and what they are most likely to do. That means it is incumbent on organizers to explore multiple methods and platforms for encouraging engagement.

Time is clearly scarce for many who would like to provide input on transportation funding issues. In a year, more than 300 people participated in 35 listening tour events. In 17 days, more than 200 people participated in the online poll.

In addition to town halls and community meetings at various locations and convenient times, public engagement organizers need to utilize multiple languages, all forms of media for advertising and outreach, multiple social media platforms, diverse community networks, and multiple channels for educational communications.

Some participants suggested that it is important to find new ways to package information, which overlaps with the goal of improving the use of technology. Others suggested that it is important to explore new themes and messages for communicating about transportation such as determining whether residents would respond to a discussion of how transportation challenges impact public safety.
Questions for Further Research

Participants in the listening tour consistently asserted that transportation planning should be an ongoing and iterative process, where ideas are generated through community dialogue, plans are formulated, vetted, and tested with the public then local projects are woven together with regional needs and a broader plan developed. The broader plan is subject to the same process of being taken to the community, re-engaging with those who helped shape the effort, and engaging with a wider circle of residents who are impacted by the proposal.

The process for evolving public participation from outreach toward engagement also requires an iterative community effort. The Lessons Learned summary above was supplemented by a long list of questions that were not included in the listening sessions and survey instruments but that participants believe warrant further investigation. The refinement of further areas for research on strengthening public outreach can best be undertaken in collaboration with stakeholders in the community. The following list of questions is meant to be suggestive and not exhaustive.

- How can transportation planning be better incorporated into dialogues concerning development policy issues?
- How do policymakers weigh statewide policy goals versus local transportation goals that do not always align?
- What is the best way to include broad community input into an expenditure plan without losing control of the process?
- What is the best scope for transportation funding projects, how local or regional should be the span of each project?
- How do you integrate the need to anticipate new transportation infrastructure or innovation and the immediate pressure to fix congested or deteriorating modes of transport?
- How can planning and community engagement help build trust across the distinct needs of rural, urban, and suburban residents throughout the region?
- What is the role of employers in crafting transportation solutions and how do we balance economic growth and quality of life?

“A robust engagement process”

A power point provided during the listening tour by Sacramento Transit Riders Union (SacTRU) representatives describing their recommendations for a more “robust public engagement process” serves effectively as a summary of the participants’ suggestions and comments on how to evolve from outreach to engagement. They recommend an ongoing process to engage a broad base of community members, focusing on neighborhood specific improvement projects, providing concrete examples of how expenditures are going to directly impact constituents, and consistently delivering clear research in accessible language to help members of the community participate in the process.
Listening tour participants at one convening emphasized: “We need a process of engaging the public in an authentic way that is going to encourage two-way conversation.” The goal of such a process, they indicated, is to make sure participants in the dialogue are changed by the interaction, that the information given as feedback is received and acted on by public officials.

Following the completion of listening tour sessions, the facilitator team convened to analyze and their work and to articulate some of the insights they had gained through their exchanges with residents throughout the county. A key theme of the debrief was the importance balancing the technical expertise of traffic engineers and public policy experts with the ideas of local residents impacted by the changes under consideration. Digging deeply into the needs of stakeholders can help to strengthen insights of public officials and allow planners to better assess future priorities.

The officials hope the summary of the input from the listening tour can generate a broader range of methods for Sacramento residents to participate in the future. Officials, experts, and residents working together to identify priorities allows more thorough understanding of potential projects the community finds valuable and can improve public transportation decisions.

Tools to generate public input are techniques that can be used to encourage local residents to participate more fully in the decision process. Use of these tools can provide valuable opportunities to members of the public to share information and express their opinions and perspectives for consideration in decision making. However, not all outreach and input mechanisms work in the same way. There are a broad array of potential outreach mechanisms and the key to engaging in two-way communication is selecting appropriate vehicles for input.

The ILG, the research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties and the California Special Districts Association, whose mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial and easy-to-use resources for California communities, suggests: “it’s important to draw distinctions among the various ways people can become involved. This is important because understanding these differences will help local officials ‘fit’ the best approach (or approaches) to the issue, policy or controversy at hand.”

The assessment of the successful Los Angeles Measure A transportation tax initiative was that the best methods for refining the process for designing transportation ballot measures are collaborative bottom up processes, early and long-term strategic planning, seeking input from a broad and strong group of stakeholders, a widespread and robust public education program, and bold leadership. All of those suggestions were raised during the listening tour as recommendations for improving public engagement throughout Sacramento County.

The ILG calls the threshold for this type of process “public consultation” where public engagement includes local officials asking for the individual views and recommendations of local residents. The more robust version of this process is referred to by the ILG as “public problem solving” where “public engagement typically takes place through the work of place-based committees or task forces, often with multisector membership, that over an extended period of time address public problems through collaborative planning, implementation, monitoring and/or assessment.”

Listening tour participants did not seek standing committees or permanent task forces, but did encourage a thorough ongoing process that allowed a long-term engagement with local community members at all stages of the transportation funding process, including periodic report backs after the implementation of any funding measure. The essential elements of rigorous public engagement are present in the outreach guide, but the perception of participants is that the process needs to be renewed and practiced more rigorously.
One aid for expanding the capacity to engage in more effective public outreach is to consider how to move up the Spectrum of Public Participation as articulated by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The spectrum describes five levels of community engagement to help assess how much influence a community has in planning and decision-making processes. Often the spectrum is utilized by an agency or organization to determine how much potential influence they are willing to provide in a specific situation. In the case of the Sacramento County listening tour, we have used it to describe the level of influence participants asserted stakeholders want to have in the ongoing development of transportation funding policies.

The levels the Spectrum of Public Engagement developed by the IAP2 are:

- **Inform**: provide objective information to aid the public in understanding an issue.
- **Consult**: obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and decisions.
- **Involve**: work throughout the process to ensure public concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.
- **Collaborate**: partner with the public on each aspect from developing alternatives to deciding on solutions.
- **Empower**: final decision making in the hands of the public.

Any particular public outreach tool can be used at any level of engagement. For instance, polling and focus groups could be a part of a one-way process at the Consult level, but it can also be part of a more participatory or consensus building process at the Collaborate level. Selecting a level of participation does not mean the level cannot change, nor is the selected level the only one that can be used. It can be quite appropriate to also provide ways of engaging the community at lower levels than the level selected. For example, some people may not have the time and energy to participate in day long workshop held at the Collaborate level, but might still want to have the opportunity to contribute their ideas.

Selecting a level of engagement is an important first step in improving community engagement but the values underpinning the effort to engage at that level are just as important. The IAP2 has developed seven values that are the foundation of the organization’s approach to effective public participation. In coordination with the U.S.-based National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, they have also developed a similar and supporting set of core principles for public participation. Who engages with the public, and how the engagement is done, is just as important as the intended level of engagement, according to these sources.

To involve means to include. At the involve level, the public is invited into the process, usually from the beginning, and is provided multiple if not ongoing opportunities for input as decision-making progresses. However, the agency is still the decision-maker and there is no expectation of building consensus or providing the public with any sort of high-level influence over the decision.

To collaborate means to work together. At the collaborate level, the public is directly engaged in decision-making. It implies an interactive process with an emphasis on two-way communications processes. Collaborate often includes the explicit attempt to find consensus solutions. However, as at involve, the agency is still the ultimate decision-maker. The degree to which consensus will be sought and how much decision authority the agency is willing to share must be made explicit. In the end, the agency will take all of the input received and make the decision. Conducting a collaboration level program is time-consuming and resource intensive and should not be entered into lightly.

The current process of funding transportation projects through sales tax measures places the final decision making power over those decisions in a two-thirds vote of registered voters. In that sense, the spectrum of public participation does empower the public on these issues. If the vote passes, the agency requesting the sales tax will implement what the voters pass. The Los Angeles Measure M experience indicates that if the collaborative process for shaping transportation is continued into a community campaign for passing the funding initiative, the chances of success are even greater. The recommendations of the listening tour participants indicate that by involving and collaborating with stakeholders over the long-term, local officials and decisionmakers will be more likely to shape a transportation funding issue that will be supported by the required two-thirds majority of the voters.
The primary objective of the listening tour was to encourage a two-way dialogue between stakeholders and local governments officials throughout Sacramento County. Secondary objectives included gathering qualitative insight into how best to reach out to members of the public and what categories of transportation funding were most important to those who participated in the community meetings. While the process was designed to primarily encourage qualitative input, some responses to questions raised during the listening tour could be tabulated. In addition, a broader online survey was distributed to the full listening tour database as well as more than 12,000 voting-age Sacramento County residents via social media advertising. The quantitative results follow.

Methods for Engaging in Public Outreach

PLATFORMS FOR PUBLIC OUTREACH FROM LISTENING TOUR RESPONSES

During the 35 community-based stakeholder listening sessions, all participants were encouraged to describe the “best way to gather meaningful public input to assess how transportation improvements are funded.” A wide spectrum on individual forums and platforms for reaching out to the public were suggested, see list below. The consensus among participants was that public agencies need to utilize all available modes of communication, but that the most effective means of moving from one-way to two-way communications was to work with community organizations to hold a diverse groups of community meetings hosted by local organizations in local communities in places and at times convenient to constituents.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS (31)

- Neighborhood Associations (11)
- Town Halls (7)
- Business Groups and Chambers of Commerce (5)
- Schools and Educational Institutions (4)
- Faith-based Organizations (4)

ADVERTISING (26)

- Radio and Television Broadcast (5)
- Email (5)
- Mass Market Publications (4)
- Direct Mail (4)
- Websites (3)
- Newsletters and targeted publications (3)
- Buses and Bus Shelters (2)

SOCIAL MEDIA (15)

- Multiple platforms including Next Door, Facebook, organizational websites, blogs, online newsletters, mobile phone apps.

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH (10)

- Surveys (mail, online, etc.) (7)
- Telephone Polling (live and automated) (3)
ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSES

The online survey utilized three questions to probe attitudes about public input on how transportation improvement issues should be funded. One focused on rating the importance of providing various opportunities for input. A second focused on the best mechanisms for giving meaningful input. The third on which mechanism the respondents would be most willing to personally participate in.

Responses to the first two questions both rated the in-person mechanism of the community meeting as the most important opportunity and the best mechanism for meaningful input. When it came to how respondents would most likely personally provide input, the top choice was to go to a website and provide input remotely, and not engage in interpersonal communication with officials.

Prioritizing Transportation Investment

LISTENING TOUR RESPONSES

Rather than attempt to develop a massive list of all projects that participants in the transportation listening tour might want to emphasize for funding, the goal was to assess the most popular categories of projects than could be funded with a transportation revenue measure. Some participants provided detailed lists of very specific local projects they believed should be considered. But all participants were allowed to respond to both an open-ended question on funding priorities and to rank their top three priorities out of a list of ten suggested funding categories.

The transportation improvements that resonated most with participants included repairing and repaving roads, adding bicycle lanes, and traffic congestion relief. The numbers following each category of improvement listed below indicates the total number of times the issue was mentioned in response to Question 8 on the listening tour in-depth interview questions. It asked participants to “select your top three potential categories for funding from a measure.”

1. Fixing and repairing roads, including filling potholes, repaving streets, and adding bike lanes (127)
2. Relieving traffic on local roads and highways (99)
3. Improving neighborhood livability, including sidewalks and streetlights (64)
4. Improving bicycle and pedestrian safety (51)
5. Expanding and improving service for the Sacramento Regional Transit District (SRTD) (51)
6. Extending light rail (48)
7. Repairing deteriorating bridges and overpasses (48)
8. Building an expressway connecting Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova, and Folsom (44)
9. Improving microtransit and neighborhood level public transit (37)
10. Undergrounding utilities (24)

ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSES

Based on issues raised in the listening tour, aspects of the initial in-depth interview questions were modified to reflect stakeholder concerns. One category of funding was removed from the online list: underground utilities. Two categories of funding were added to the survey: improving accessibility for seniors and the disabled, and offering a freeway express lane. The term “microtransit” was removed from the original question about neighborhood level public transit.

The transportation improvements that resonated most with survey respondents were similar, but not identical, with the views of community meeting participants. Increased safety for bicyclists and pedestrians was at the top of the list, followed closely by repairing and repaving roads. The percentages are a total of those respondents who found each category extremely important or somewhat important.

1. Improving bicycle and pedestrian safety (86%)
2. Fixing and repairing roads, including filling potholes, repaving streets, and adding bike lanes (80%)
3. Improving neighborhood-level public transit (79%)
4. Expanding and improving service for the Sacramento Regional Transit District (SRTD) (79%)
5. Repairing deteriorating bridges and overpasses (75%)
6. Improving accessibility for seniors and the disabled (73%)
7. Extending light rail (72%)
8. Improving neighborhood livability, including sidewalks and streetlights (71%)
9. Relieving traffic congestion on local roads and highways (56%)
10. Building an expressway connecting Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova, and Folsom (29%)
11. Offering a freeway express lane, for a small daily fee (15%)
ONLINE FUNDING ALLOCATION PRINCIPLES

Survey respondents were clear that there are diverse transportation needs throughout Sacramento County and that there is no simple one-size-fits-all approach to funding. More than four out of five respondents indicated they wanted to take into account differences among urban, suburban, and rural transportation needs when considering funding issues. And, more than two out of five want to see funding allocated based on need.

Chart 3: Online Response Transportation Investment Priorities

Chart 4: More than four in five agree that different communities have different transportation needs.
Online survey respondents strongly support the allocation of transportation funding based on local need. The next three highest rated principles for allocating transportation funding were far less of a priority for respondents. Top bases for transportation funding allocation according to the survey:

1. Each community’s level of need (44%)
2. Areas least served by transit should get the most funding (14%)
3. Distributed equitably across the County (13%)
4. Areas with the worst roads should get the most funding (5%)

Chart 5: Two in five agree that transportation funding should be allocated based on need.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding allocation principle</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each community’s level of need</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas least served by transit should get the most funding</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed equitably across the County</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas with the worst roads should get the most funding</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methodology

In response to significant and ongoing stakeholder feedback on community expectations for more opportunities to provide meaningful input on issues and needs for future transportation ballot initiatives, local officials determined to investigate the implications and meaning of those community recommendations. In 2018, a community outreach process was authorized by local officials including an analysis and report on stakeholder input to provide policymakers with foundational insights into the perspectives of residents, across sectors and locations, relative to public involvement in developing transportation ballot measures in Sacramento County.

The local officials guiding this process formed a steering committee, which was comprised of Sacramento Supervisor Patrick Kennedy, Sacramento Supervisor Susan Peters, and Sacramento City Councilmember Jay Schenirer, Elk Grove Councilmember Patrick Hume and Folsom Councilmember Andy Morin. They provided direction to the consultant team in developing the database and listening tour process. Supervisor Kennedy and Councilmember Schenirer provided ongoing oversight to the consultant team, including periodic review of feedback from stakeholders and guidance on reaching elected officials, community leaders, and other key stakeholders to schedule meetings.

The steering committee determined to utilize stakeholder listening sessions to explore ways to strengthen public outreach. To investigate current stakeholder perceptions on civic outreach, the consultant team outlined a three-step process to engage more deeply with transportation stakeholders in the Sacramento County part of their jurisdiction:
• First, through the development of a stakeholder contact list and database of at least 750 organizations, community groups, and engaged county residents, the process sought to facilitate consistent and ongoing communication with interested stakeholders.

• Second, through a county-wide listening tour including one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, small group presentations and listening sessions, and a series of community conversations grounded in traditional focus group qualitative research methods to engage in two-way dialogue on transportation issues, the process sought to solicit input on how to improve stakeholder outreach.

• Third, through the deployment of an online outreach and survey effort to elicit input from interested individuals within Sacramento County, the process sought to communicate beyond the stakeholders who were able to attend events.

As the final list of in-depth transportation listening session interview questions makes clear, the primary objective of this process was to allow participants to express their ideas on “the best way to gather meaningful public input” in order to develop a stronger “process to design a measure” for transportation funding.

The year-long process resulted in a stakeholder database of 810 stakeholder organizations and individuals with demonstrated interest in transportation issues. Those stakeholders live in incorporated and unincorporated communities throughout the county. They participate in transportation issues through a variety of organizations and informal networks as well as the political process. The listening tour invited those organizations and individuals, as well as other interested stakeholders, to participate in 35 listening tour events. Participants were convened in locally hosted community gatherings including several one-on-one interviews, as well as group meetings and conversations with neighborhood associations, business organizations, and transportation advocacy groups.

All together, these community listening events involved more than 300 individuals representing 107 Sacramento County-based organizations. In addition, the online survey was emailed directly to the entire database as well as offered to 12,790 county residents via Facebook advertising.

**STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION**

The development of the stakeholder database involved building upon existing agency stakeholder lists, incorporating neighborhood association and business organization data from Sacramento County officials and leaders from the cities of Folsom, Elk Grove, Carmichael, Isleton, Galt, Rancho Cordova, and Sacramento, as well as engaging in outreach to community groups and organizations focused on transportation issues. List development included contact with neighborhood associations in incorporated and unincorporated communities, property and business improvement districts (PBIDs), environmental organizations, taxpayer associations, labor organizations, trade associations, chambers of commerce, social justice and community-based organizations, and individual transportation issue activists and experts.

**LISTENING TOUR**

The listening tour outreach process was launched in late July 2018 and continued through June 2019. Meetings were held at 35 different locations throughout the incorporated cities and unincorporated areas of Sacramento County. Meetings were hosted by neighborhood associations, business groups, elected officials, transportation advocacy organizations, community groups, labor organizations, chambers of commerce, universities, and regional organizations.

(A complete list of listening tour event hosts and organizational participants can be found in the appendix.)

Local elected officials formed a steering committee and volunteered to conduct stakeholder listening sessions in Sacramento County and incorporated cities of the county. The focus of these sessions was to allow a wide array of members of the Sacramento County community to provide input on issues and needs for future transportation ballot initiatives, to assess how to improve the process of public participation in the future, and to hear feedback on how past public participation efforts in the development of ballot measures were perceived by stakeholders.
The sessions were scheduled in local community-based locations and at convenient times for participants. Each session was structured to provide informal, comfortable settings for groups of stakeholders to provide open dialogue with a member of the steering committee while the consultant team was present to take notes and record comments without direct attribution. FM3 Research helped to develop the 14-question listening session in-depth interview instrument that served as a guide for steering committee and the consultant team to engage with stakeholders in both the one-on-one interviews and the larger stakeholder listening sessions.

FM3 developed the listening tour guide in early July 2018. Test listening sessions were held later that month. In August, the steering committee met with the consultant team to refine the survey instrument and launch the full listening tour. On average, there were three community-based listening sessions per month over the next year in order to ensure the availability of the steering committee and consultant team.

The basic structure of the interview instrument guided all of the community conversations. Not every question on the list of in-depth interview questions was asked in every interview or discussion session. Whether the information was asked or volunteered, every listening session had a dialogue concerning the best methods for gathering meaningful public input, the best methods for refining the process of designing transportation ballot measures, and the factors impacting the chances for a successful ballot measure.

In the one-on-one sessions, the dialogue was more open-ended, and the questions were framed to encourage ongoing conversation. There was less effort to prioritize funding categories and more emphasis on sharing ideas on strengthening the process of designing transportation funding measures.

In the small-group sessions, where there were as many as 25 participants at one time, there was a greater mixture of close-ended questions and an effort to more systematically rank a pre-determined list of potential transportation project types. Participants were encouraged at the outset of the group discussions to take the time to write down some of their own thoughts. Several organizations and some individuals provided notes to the consultants. All participants in the group conversations received a list of potential funding priorities and asked to rank the top three categories of funding according to their own standards. Out of the more than 300 participants in these sessions, 187 top three priority lists were returned.

The priority list was developed with input from the steering committee members and research that the consultant undertook identifying previous transportation categories from the 2004 and 2016 Sacramento County Transportation Expenditure Plans and the Transportation Expenditure Plan developed for Los Angeles County Measure M. The goal of the project list was to develop a tool that was transferable between transportation policy advocates who have a high-level of transportation policy knowledge and neighborhood community organizations who may not understand the jargon but can connect to everyday transportation terminology.

Recommendations for specific methods of public outreach were compiled from the 79 suggestions noted at the 35 listening sessions. They were originally grouped in 16 different subject areas (business organizations, town halls, neighborhood associations, school groups, faith-based groups, community groups, mass market publications, buses and bus shelters, email, websites, broadcast radio and television, websites, telephones, opinion surveys, social media platforms, newsletters). On further analysis, those recommendations were grouped in four broad outreach categories: Social Media Platforms, Public Opinion Research, Advertising Platforms, and Community Meetings. Those broad categories influenced the format of the opportunities for public input questions in the online survey.

The list of transportation funding priorities was compiled and tabulated from 187 individuals participating in listening sessions who responded to a form asking them to select their top three potential categories for funding from a list of ten potential transportation measure categories. Those selections were then tabulated for each funding category without regard to their priority. The decision to not weight the different priorities occurred because some respondents did not rank their selections, others chose only two or added an extra priority, and others pointed out a primary concern but did not rank other responses. The differences in responses means that the total number of ranked priorities does not equal 187 multiplied by three priorities.
The unattributed comments by participants in the session were compiled by their relevance to each of the 14 questions in the in-depth interview guide. Any written testimony brought to a listening session was divided and added to the appropriate question. Questions 8, 9, and 10 provide the basis for the analysis of Prioritizing Transportation Investment. Questions 1, 2, 3, 7, 13, and 14 provide the basis for the analysis leading to Lessons Learned, Methods for Engaging in Public Outreach, and the effort to articulate Questions Needing Further Research.

LESSONS LEARNED

Both the in-person interview question guide and the online survey contained both closed- and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions have been compiled, subjected to quantified analyses, and reported on the appropriate measurement scale in the findings. But, the goal of the outreach process was to listen to stakeholders, capture their responses, and then to search for qualitative meaning about how best to interact with stakeholders when it comes to developing transportation projects and funding plans.

Throughout the listening tour responses to the open-ended questions were recorded and compiled. Over time, key themes were identified including listening, dialogue, outreach, input, trust, engagement, education, and cooperation.

At the conclusion of the listening tour and the online survey, all open-ended questions were reviewed and analyzed according to the key themes that had emerged from the data. Those themes were compared to the Seven Core Principles for Public Engagement articulated by the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) and other leaders in public engagement. The recommendations for public engagement made by Sacramento County residents were also assessed and ranked using the five-point Spectrum of Public Participation developed by the International Association of Public Participation.

The results were then grouped as lessons about how participants suggest that officials engage and involve Sacramento County stakeholders in a stronger process for developing, prioritizing projects, and then formulating a transportation funding plan with the involvement of stakeholders. The central theme to emerge was that the listening tour was a good first step in evolving the civic involvement process from the more one-directional effort to undertake effective outreach to the more two-way effort to engage with distinct local communities through an ongoing process.

Stakeholder insights into how to strengthen local government processes of working with communities in developing public policy have been articulated in a series of Lessons Learned and Questions Needing Further Research. The goal of the listening tour research was to indicate a direction for the development and refinement of stronger public engagement processes. The next steps will be to utilize the recommended lessons to generate new methods for engaging Sacramento stakeholders and to test them in real situations.

ONLINE SURVEY

FM3 Research utilizes a variety of research tools to provide clients with strategic insights and advice on transportation, land use, local government, environmental and other issues. They utilize quantitative and qualitative tools to help their clients equip themselves with the tools to make better-informed decisions.

In addition to equipping the steering committee to utilize an in-person survey instrument to engage focus groups and one-on-one executive interviews, FM3 designed and executed an online survey conducted by Sacramento County residents. The survey was live from August 23 to September 10, 2019. Links to the survey were distributed to all of the individuals and organizations on the stakeholder database developed for this project, as well as through links offered via Facebook advertising to 12,790 voting age county residents. The survey had a mechanism for guarding against repeat completion of the survey by the same person.

In addition to the usual complement of demographic questions, the online survey contained 10 transportation focused questions. Two of the questions were open-ended and eight focused on three areas: prioritizing categories of transportation investment projects, assessing preferred modes or mechanisms for public input, and attitudes on how county residents should approach transportation funding.
Based on issues raised in the listening tour aspects of the initial in-depth interviews, online survey questions were modified to reflect stakeholder concerns. One category of funding was removed from the online list: underground utilities. Two categories of funding were added to the survey: improving accessibility for seniors and the disabled, and offering a freeway express lane. The term “microtransit” was removed from the original question about neighborhood level public transit.

The online survey utilized three questions to probe attitudes about public input on how transportation improvement issues should be funded. One focused on rating the importance of providing various opportunities for input. A second focused on the best mechanisms for giving meaningful input. And, the third focused on which mechanism the respondents would be most willing to participate.

BACKGROUND

Following the failed 2016 Sacramento County transportation ballot measure, local elected officials determined that it would be valuable to study stakeholder opinion of how the public participation process worked, or didn’t, during the development of that initiative. Following a post-mortem review, delegations were dispatched to Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) and to Sound Transit 3 (ST3) in the Seattle metropolitan area to analyze how their recent transportation funding measures were able to succeed.

The Los Angeles Measure M initiative which garnered 71.5% support in the same November 2016 election where Sacramento’s Measure B fell just short with 65.7% support, has subsequently become a model for effective community involvement in developing transportation plans. LACMTA attributes their success to a “bottom up” approach of engaging all the sub-regions of the county as essential in developing a widespread and diverse plan of projects and improvements and generating buy-in and support for their transportation measure.

This study is the result of a decision to seek bottom up public input on how Sacramento might create a more effective public design and engagement process for future ballot measures. The local officials guiding this process formed a steering committee, which was comprised of Sacramento Supervisor Patrick Kennedy, Sacramento Supervisor Susan Peters, Sacramento City Councilmember Jay Schenirer, Elk Grove Councilmember Patrick Hume and Folsom Councilmember Andy Morin. The provided direction to the consultant team in developing the database and listening tour process. Supervisor Kennedy and Councilmember Schenirer provided ongoing oversight to the consultant team, including periodic review of feedback from stakeholders and guidance on reaching elected officials, community leaders, and other key stakeholders to schedule meetings.
We would like to thank the following organizations for participating in the listening tour process:

(The following organizations are listed in alphabetical order)

- 350 Sacramento
- AARP California
- Airco Mechanical
- AMPAC Fine Chemicals
- Arden Arcade Rotary Club
- Asian Resources Inc
- Associated General Contractors of California
- AT&T
- Avondale Glen Elder Neighborhood Association
- Breathe California
- Bricklayers Local 3
- California Asian Chamber of Commerce
- CAPITAL
- Capitol Area Development Authority
- Carmichael PBID
- Carmichael Rec. Park District
- Carmichael Village, LLC
- CBRE Industrial Properties
- City of Sacramento Active Transportation Commission
- Comcast
- D&S Development
- Deerfield Mesa Grande Neighborhood Association
- Dignity Health
- Discovery Hydrovac
- Elk Grove Chamber of Commerce
- Elliott Homes, Inc
- Environmental Council of Sacramento
- EPIC Insurance
- Ethan Conrad Properties
- F&M Bank
- Fahn Properties
- Fite Development
- Florin Road Arts and Business Complex
- Florin Road Partnership
- Folsom Lake College
- Frank M. Booth
- Franklin Boulevard Business District
- Freeport Blvd Traffic Safety Committee
- Fruitridge Printing
- Furniture USA
- George S. Reed
- GLA Corp
- Gold River Community Association
- Golf Course Terrace Estates
- Greater Broadway Partnership
- Heller Pacific
- Heritage Community Credit Union
- Highway 50 Transit Management Agency
- International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allies Workers
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers 340
- International Brotherhood of Teamsters
- International Union of Operating Engineers Local 3
- International Union of Painters and Allied Trades
- Ironworkers Local 118
- Iu-Mien Community Services
- Japanese American Citizens League
- Kaiser Permanente
- KP International Market
- Lawrence Park Neighborhood Association
- Los Rios Community College District
- Lotus Casino
- Mack Property Development LLC
- Mack Road Partnership
- Market One Builders
- Mc Wong Enterprise
- Midtown Business Association
- Murphy Austin Adams Schoenfeld LLP
- My Sister's House
- Newmark Merrill
- North Natomas JIBE
- Northern California Carpenters Local 46
- Northern California District Council of Laborers Local 185
- Operative Plasterers and Cement Masons
- Organization of Chinese Americans
- Pacific Gas and Electric
- Paratransit
- Phoenix Hospitality Group
- Phoenix Park Community
- Plumbers and Pipefitters UA 447
- Principal Financial Group
- R Street Partnership
- Rancho Cordova Chamber of Commerce
- Rancho Cordova Travel & Tourism
- Region Business
- Resources for Independent Living
- Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates
- Sacramento Association of Realtors
- Sacramento Black Parallel School Board
- Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency
- Sacramento Regional Transit Mobility Advisory Committee
- Sacramento Sierra Building Trades
- Sacramento State University
- Sacramento Telangana Association
- Sacramento Transit Riders Union
- Saigon Bay
- SBDC Consulting
- Sheetmetal Workers Union Local 104
- Shopsmart
- Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter
- SKK Development
- Smith Real Estate Services
- SMUD
- South Pocket Homeowners Association
- South Sacramento Christian Center
- Southeast Village Neighborhood Association
- Stockton Blvd Partnership
- Sublime Digital Marketing Group
- Sundt Construction
- Syblon Reid
- Turton Commercial Real Estate
- UC Davis
- UC Davis Health Systems
- Unger Construction
- Valley Vision
- Verizon
- Vinh Phat Market
- Walk Sacramento
- Warren G. Bender
- Wasatch Properties
- Wells Fargo
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WEBSITES CONSULTED

FM3 Research (Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz and Associates) Website: https://fm3research.com

IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) Website: https://www.iap2.org

Institute for Local Government Website: https://www.ca-ilg.org

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation Website: http://ncdd.org/rc/item/3643

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