



Public Involvement Plan

Long Range Transportation Plan 2045



2045 Transportation Plan Public Involvement Plan

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Prepared by



In partnership with





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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background – Planning for the Year 2045

Planning Lee County's transportation system for the year 2045 presents vast opportunities and real challenges. How will our region grow and evolve? What type of transportation system will best meet the future needs of our residents and visitors? What kinds of projects will we be able to afford? The Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) seeks to answer these questions and more while developing the 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which is scheduled for adoption by the MPO Board in December 2020.

As a condition to receive federal capital and/or operating assistance, the MPO must have in place and use a Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive (3-C) transportation planning process to develop a comprehensively planned 20-year LRTP. The LRTP is a multimodal plan that includes transit, pedestrian, bikeway, and roadway/highway facilities. This multimodal LRTP also addresses the safety of the transportation system, integration of land uses, economic development, freight and goods movement, and accessibility to airports and rail. To comply with federal guidelines, the MPO is updating the LRTP with a 2045 planning horizon.

As part of the update process, the MPO has prepared this Public Involvement Plan (PIP) to create a clear and comprehensive framework for providing information to and obtaining input from stakeholders, which include citizens, agencies, and private and other special interest groups, including residents, businesses, governmental entities, and non-governmental advocacy groups. The remainder of this document describes the purpose, process, objectives, and schedule in more detail.

1.2 Importance of Public Involvement

Public involvement is crucial to building a credible and trusting relationship between transportation agencies and the community. As the metropolitan planning organization for Bonita Springs, Cape Coral, Estero, Fort Myers, Fort Myers Beach, Sanibel, and unincorporated Lee County, we provide leadership in transportation planning. We engage the public and cultivate effective partnerships with local governments and transportation industry experts to create the best plan possible for Lee County – one that addresses transportation challenges and prepares our region for the future.

Successfully engaging a broad cross-section of residents, visitors, business owners and employers, agencies, advocacy groups and other interested parties will enable the MPO to create a vision for the future that serves all of Lee County. Effective engagement will foster partnerships, will build awareness and educate stakeholders about the transportation planning process, and will promote active listening and fruitful, two-way dialogue. The public involvement efforts also recognize and will address obstacles to participation in the planning process, especially among minority, low-income and transit-dependent individuals, as well as those with a low English proficiency.





The Lee County MPO is committed to community outreach that is:

- **Thorough:** Outreach should be comprehensive, providing many options for how a person can get involved.
- **Inclusive:** Everyone is welcome to participate in the 2045 Plan process. We want to make sure participants are as diverse as our region, therefore, we make a concerted effort to reach traditionally underserved communities – even when language barriers arise.
- **Creative:** We strive to use both traditional and cutting-edge tools and techniques to reach the public.
- **Continuous:** Members of the public should be able to participate at times convenient to them. This means using tools that enable 24/7 involvement.

The public involvement process provides an opportunity to help stakeholders learn about how transportation projects develop, what technical and engineering concepts are used to guide that development, how transportation affects the quality of our everyday lives, and how transportation projects are funded. Through the process, we will identify priorities such as reliability, safety, variety, trip quality, travel time, and trip cost; all things the public experiences and considers important yet can be challenging for them to define quantitatively. Discussing tradeoffs (livability, commute times, transportation costs) is a useful way to engage people in thinking about transportation issues and how they can impact individuals and their community.

The MPO brings clarity and transparency to the long-range transportation planning process by proactively and continuously communicating the long-range planning development process, schedule, key milestones, and opportunities for public involvement.

1.3 Purpose and Goals of the 2045 LRTP Public Involvement Plan

The 2045 LRTP Public Involvement Plan (LPIP) outlines the opportunities and techniques to be considered for all public outreach activities throughout the plan's development. It also identifies strategies to reach the underrepresented communities/citizens as well as those most affected by transportation decisions. Lee County is home to a population of 755,000 people. As of 2018, 15.3% of Lee County residents were born outside of the country (113,000 people). Spanish is spoken as the primary language by 17% of the population.

The LPIP provides information to the public to encourage early and continuous public participation, including background information about the plan update, timely public notice procedures, and full disclosure of key decisions during the plan development process. The MPO must consult with a wide variety of state and local agencies and give the general public, private groups, businesses, and organizations, opportunities to comment on the Plan. Agencies included are those responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation.





The Public Involvement Plan for the 2045 LRTP is consistent with the goals of the MPO's PIP and Title VI program (Adopted June 2017):

- Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the LRTP;
- Provide adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decisions, such as but not limited to the approval of the LRTP;
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the plan development process;
 - Employ visualization techniques to describe the LRTP (maps and charts of changes);
 - Make the LRTP and any associated information available in electronic format such as World Wide Web through the MPO's website (www.leempo.com);
 - Hold public meetings at convenient times and accessible locations;
 - Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally under served by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households;
 - When significant written and oral comments are received on a draft LRTP (including the financial plan) as a result of public involvement, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final LRTP; and
 - If the final LRTP differs significantly from the one made available for public comment or raises new material issues, an additional opportunity for public comment must be made available.

1.3.1 Response to COVID-19 State of Emergency

Consistent with the recently incorporated provisions to the MPO's PIP for addressing emergencies, the public involvement activities of the LRTP have and may continue to demonstrate flexibility with engaging the public and receiving input. As part of the current declared state of emergency for Florida and Federal policy direction for limiting public gatherings, the Lee MPO will exercise discretion in convening meetings of the MPO Board, Advisory Committees and Public Workshops – events where the public is encouraged to participate and provide input to the planning process. Consistent with the PIP goals, information regarding changes to meeting times, formats and locations will be advertised on the MPO's website.

The emergency provisions in the PIP outline a series of strategies for addressing short-term and long-term responses. It is anticipated that the current declared state of emergency will be concluded prior to the adoption of the 2045 LRTP by the MPO Board and will therefore follow the strategies outlined under the short-term response. The MPO Board adopted a resolution on May 15, 2020 regarding the currently declared emergency allowing for virtual meetings and alternative strategies for gathering public input on the LRTP. The timing of future public outreach will be developed consistent with the MPO's PIP and Continuity of Operations Plan. Access to material developed for the 2045 LRTP will primarily be provided through the MPO's website. Outreach efforts are anticipated to include virtual meetings hosted through online video and presentation sharing platforms, coordination with the local government's websites and their outreach capabilities, LeeTV, Lee County's government access channel, and local media outlets. If the declared state of emergency is extended, provisions for a long-term response will be considered and utilized as needed.

2045 Transportation Plan

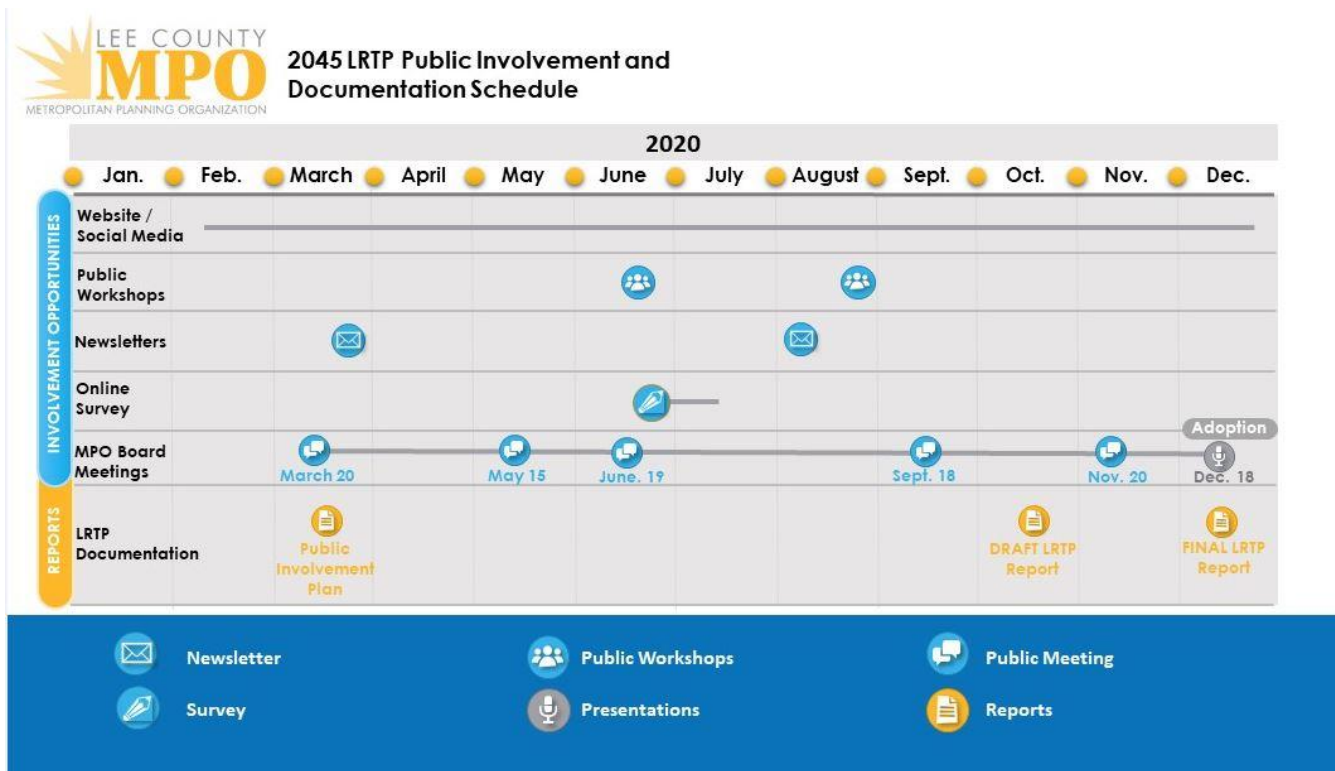




1.4 Public Involvement during the 2045 LRTP Development Process

The overall development process of the 2045 LRTP can be seen in Figure 1-1. Core efforts that involve the public and the MPO Board and Committees have already been completed, including a Land Use Scenario Plan, and Goals and Objectives for the LRTP. Public outreach is an on-going process with the MPO, but key milestones for the plan are expected to take place in early summer with a discussion on transportation needs, and early fall when the conversation will focus on cost feasible projects and availability of transportation funding.

Figure 1-1: 2045 LRTP Timeline





2.0 Who is Involved in the 2045 LRTP Process?

To engender public trust and understanding, those developing the 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan will communicate with a wide variety of stakeholders and citizens. Stakeholders identified include representatives from federal, state, and local government agencies with jurisdictional interests, elected and appointed officials, and citizen and business groups representing a variety of public interests. Stakeholders and other interested citizens will be encouraged to seek information about the Plan and to participate in the transportation planning process.

Involving people with an interest in the plan and enlisting their participation will produce a plan that meets community needs. It is important to involve citizens and groups that accurately represent the full range of issues and opinions, including those of the traditionally underrepresented.

Stakeholders are categorized into two groups: agency partners and community partners. Agency partners include Lee County agencies, local jurisdictions and agencies, LeeTran, FDOT, neighboring MPOs, and others.

Community partners may include:

- Neighborhood Associations
- Service and Community Organizations
- Affinity Organizations (Elderly/Disabled/Minority/Disenfranchised)
- Non-Profit Organizations
- Property Owners
- Chambers of Commerce
- Small and Large Business Owners
- Professional Associations
- Transportation Disadvantaged Community
- Daily and Community Newspapers and Media Organizations
- Local Municipalities

This list may be modified and/or amended to allow for flexibility in the LPIP in order to respond to new audiences and issues as they emerge.

2.1 MPO Board and Committees

Prior to making decisions, the MPO receives recommendations from committees, which include the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), the Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (LCB), the Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinating Committee (BPCC), and the Traffic Management and Operations Committee (TMOC). The CAC consists of 26 appointed citizens; the TAC consists of local and state agency planners, engineers, and transit operators; the Transportation Disadvantaged LCB consists of government, social service agencies, citizen, and consumer representatives; the BPCC consists of the local and state agency personnel and citizens who are responsible for bicycle and pedestrian planning for their agencies; and the TMOC consists of the local and state agency personnel who are responsible for public works/traffic engineering, public safety/emergency management, multimodal, and other traffic management and operations related activities for their agencies.





The CAC and TAC will be briefed at regular meetings to provide opportunities to review and comment throughout development of the 2045 Transportation Plan. Committee members will be asked to help with survey distribution and collecting constituent needs and opinions on Plan goals, and to attend scheduled public participation events when possible. A meeting schedule will be created and updated as needed for easy identification of major milestones and coordination with the plan schedule. Presentations will be made to the MPO Committees and Board during major milestones of the 2045 LRTP process.

2.2 Neighborhood/Civic Organizations, Groups, and Local Municipalities

Traditional public outreach often only connects with those that either have a special interest or professional relationship with a project, and not the general public. As a result, most outreach activities are insular and do not engage the larger community.

Those with busy daily schedules, long workdays, and family responsibilities often cannot be reached by a single workshop advertisement in the local paper. Instead of asking residents to come to us, we must go to them. The MPO will be available to give presentations to local neighborhood and civic associations regarding development of the 2045 LRTP. In addition, MPO staff will attend community fairs, festivals, or events when appropriate. Materials will be prepared for meetings and presentations with local groups, and public comments received at the meetings will be captured and summarized.

In addition to neighborhood associations, civic organizations, and local groups, the MPO will engage all of the local municipalities, including the cities of Bonita Springs, Cape Coral, Fort Myers, and Sanibel, the Town of Fort Myers Beach, and the Village of Estero, as well as unincorporated Lee County. The MPO recognizes the importance of their involvement in the plan development process along with utilizing their outreach networks and communication resources.

2.3 Media

Community-based, local, and regional media are key participants in the public engagement process. Media outreach may include paid advertisements, press releases, and media alerts that are also distributed via internet sites, government access channels, workshop flyers, and, in some cases, through utility bill inserts or similar service mailings.

The media-related strategies and tools to be implemented during the development of the 2045 LRTP will correspond with major plan development milestones and will include developing a contact list of local media, refining the existing master list of community and business stakeholders, developing materials for press releases, public service announcements, meeting notifications, and advertisements (i.e., a “press kit”), and scheduling and conducting interviews of stakeholders, transportation users, and providers.

Establishing a professional, one-on-one relationship with key reporters and media contacts that cover the transportation or government sectors is one of the best ways to enhance the chances of getting accurate, balanced, and fair media coverage. In addition to building relationships, media events or debriefings may be arranged to help educate the press on the plan developments and key messages.





3.0 Public Involvement Strategies

Public engagement during the 2045 LRTP process will utilize a variety of strategies to reach and encourage participation by a wide audience. Potential key outreach strategies that may be considered include

- Partnering with existing groups to conduct presentations that inform and gather public input
- Speaking with people where they already are by hosting booths at community festivals or public locations
- Encouraging public participation by using an activity to gather input and increase public awareness of transportation planning
- Providing essential materials in Spanish and visually accessible formats, as needed
- Working with local government and transportation partners to identify outreach opportunities, particularly to reach underserved groups
- Developing a youth outreach program to get input from those who will be affected most by the 2045 Plan
- Reaching out to transit users through a series of Transit Talks pop-up meetings
- Encouraging event participants to see the results of their input and stay in touch throughout the 2045 LRTP development by signing up for Lee County 2045 Transportation Plan electronic newsletter

3.1 Document Design/Look and Feel

The MPO staff and Consultant team will create coherent document templates for all 2045 Transportation Plan materials including informational handouts, email blasts, presentations, surveys, and online communication to provide consistency to all products and materials pertaining to the Plan.

3.2 Communication Tools and Distributions

Using a combination of traditional and non-traditional methods of public involvement increases the chances of engaging those with busy schedules, long workdays, and other responsibilities that may keep them from participating. Innovative outreach includes a wide spectrum of formats ranging from new technologies, online outreach, and small group presentations to local clubs.

3.2.1 Informational Handouts

A fact sheet will be developed to provide project information and a summary of the planning process for the 2045 LRTP. Up to two additional fact sheets or newsletters will be developed to focus on specific areas of the plan, such as development of a needs assessment and identification of the Cost Feasible Plan. These informational materials will be distributed and used at community events and meetings, as well as made available online. The informational handouts can be made available in both English and Spanish.

3.2.2 Mailing Lists

The MPO master contact list is a key component to the MPO's public involvement process and will be maintained and updated throughout the plan's development. Interested participants will be able to add themselves to the mailing list via the MPO website or at a presentation or engagement events.





Interested attendees at all MPO-sponsored meetings will also be voluntarily added to the mailing list to help identify various affinity groups and individuals.

Fact sheets, newsletters, surveys, and other information about the project will be distributed electronically to the mailing list. The mailing list may include:

- Interagency professionals
- Elected and appointed officials
- MPO Board and Committee members
- Civic organizations, homeowners associations, and business groups
- Groups representing underserved populations
- Transportation and/or other relevant agencies
- Members of the community who have opted-in receive project updates

3.2.3 Email Blasts

Email blasts are often used to provide updates and special announcements to the mailing list. Up to five email blasts will be sent to stakeholders, their constituents, and others on the mailing list to ask for opinions and ideas as well as provide information on the Plan's development. Email blasts may be sent during specific milestones of the Plan, such as the early outreach period with an overview of the 2045 LRTP, development of a needs assessment, discussion of investment priorities, and development of the Cost Feasible Plan. Email blasts may also include information and announcements regarding public workshops and other public participation events, as well as opportunities and reminders to complete surveys and questionnaires integral to the plan.

3.2.4 Interactive and Hard-copy Surveys

Conducting periodic surveys and polls throughout the development of the Plan can help keep the public engaged and establish a baseline of the public's perception of particular projects or funding strategy. Surveys involve collecting both qualitative and quantitative information about public opinion concerning the LRTP, and can be conducted at meetings, online, or with smartphone applications (apps).

Easy and public-friendly online surveys can be created with tools such as SurveyMonkey® and are customized to fit the goals and objectives of the plan. Incentives or giveaways, such as transit passes, event tickets, or the chance to win a prize, can also encourage participation and completion of surveys and questionnaires.

Surveys can be made available online on the MPO website, announced through the mailing list, or they can be handed out in-person and collected for analysis. They can be developed and utilized to obtain the public's opinion about current and future transportation needs and the best way to prioritize public funds for future transportation improvements. Surveys may also capture demographic information about respondents, and can be made available in both English and Spanish.





3.2.5 2045 Transportation Plan Website

A website specific to the 2045 LRTP is an effective method of communication that provides a central, consistent source of updates. Web surveys can be conducted through the MPO website at critical milestones to efficiently gauge public opinion of the decision-making process.

A website can perform a number of functions, such as provide updates, allow users to submit comments, offer contact information, web links to other partners and social media accounts, as well as press and media related information. Websites can also be a repository for project related maps, plans, and information.

In addition, utilizing existing websites of partner agencies or area municipalities to post information about the 2045 LRTP can be an effective means of notification and awareness.

Project deliverables will be posted on the MPO website to ensure all public materials are available to the public. This will include public workshop event materials and summaries, surveys or questionnaires, and draft sections of the 2045 LRTP. Visitors to the MPO website will have an opportunity to comment and provide ideas and suggestions throughout the development of the plan.

3.2.6 Real-time Polling

An additional tool to gauge attitudes and opinions that is increasingly being utilized throughout long range planning projects is real-time polling. Real-time polling is an audience response system that allows a meeting facilitator to ask a series of questions and provide instant results of the responses on presentation slides for everyone to see. At the beginning of the meeting, each participant is provided a handheld remote control that enables them to select their preferred response to the question posed. Once all participants have responded, the facilitator displays a chart or graph that shows the results in real-time.

In addition to handheld remotes, there are also online audience response interfaces, such as Poll Everywhere®, allowing participants to use their own smartphones, tablets, or laptops via text messages, Twitter, or a unique website/URL.

Simple yes or no questions work best with this approach, but the use of multiple choice or more complex questions may lead to fuller discussion of the plan or a transportation improvement's issues or potential benefits. As is the case with any public involvement activity or event, results can be made available online for those unable to participate or just interested more information.

3.2.7 Illustrations

Using illustrations on websites and throughout the interactive survey can translate data into more easily understood graphic images and help effectively communicate information. Illustrations are highly useful to help communicate performance information, particularly for complex, spatially relevant transportation data. The intent is to help the public better understand the plan's context, and to add insight to problem solving.

Illustrations can be used to communicate performance measures, trends and impacts of strategies to the transportation system as well as the complex nature of trade-offs between investing in various types of transportation projects and programs. By presenting information graphically, participants





may interpret information more effectively which allows for more informed comments and ideas on Plan development, priorities and funding measures.

3.2.8 Press Kits, Press Releases and Advertisements

Press releases with meeting and workshop announcements will be sent to all media outlets in the county. All MPO-generated meeting notices and announcements related to development of the 2045 L RTP will describe the meeting purpose and answer the questions of “who, what, when, where, and how.” Notices will be displayed in public places, such as the Lee County Government Center, all county public libraries, and the Lee County Alliance for the Arts or by alternate means as available. The MPO website will also be used to promote meeting notices and announcements.

Flyers and press releases will be prepared to announce public workshops and other engagement events. These flyers will be placed at community billboard sites, government offices, libraries, non-profit and citizen assistance establishments and other high foot traffic locations throughout the county. Press releases will be prepared and sent to *The News Press*, *Boca Beacon*, *Bonita Daily News/The Banner*, *Cape Coral Breeze*, and *Florida Weekly* announcing public events, and Plan progress.

Press Kit components would include background information on the MPO, fact sheet(s), countywide transportation statistics, previous press coverage, images of key projects, logos, staff and Board members, staff contact information, and collateral promotional materials such as informational handouts. Press kits may be prepared in hard-copy format, presented on a thumb drive or compiled online.

3.3 Public Meetings

The MPO will conduct various outreach events, including public workshops during the development of the Cost Feasible Plan, a formal public hearing, and presentations to community and business groups to inform and gather feedback from the public. A comment database will be used to track events, participation, and comments.

Comments at public meetings can be collected in several formats, including comment forms for written comments and verbal comments into a recorder which allows participants to make a one-on-one comment if they prefer.

3.3.1 Public Workshops and Displays

Public workshops can be presented in a variety of formats and are designed to be structured and interactive. The workshops will be an informal gathering held at a designated location where participants can review plan-related materials, listen to and talk with other members of the public, discuss specific concerns with staff, ask questions to better understand the process, and provide comments. Workshops may include a formal presentation, scheduled and announced at a specific time, typically towards the beginning of the workshop. The workshops will be open to the public as well as all stakeholders identified or involved in the development of the plan.

The MPO and consultant will make an effort to engage the traditionally underserved and underrepresented residents in the county to ensure the plan reflects the needs and concerns of all citizens. Agendas, surveys, and exercise(s) for these workshops will be developed and distributed at





the meetings and made available on the MPO website for those wishing to review the materials online. In addition, a summary of the public workshops will be prepared and made available online and will be included in documenting the 2045 LRTP.

The consultant team will help manage workshop logistics, including scheduling, reserving workshop locations, preparing invitation list, and producing advertisements. In addition, the consultant will prepare meeting materials, including display boards, printed handouts, and presentation, help staff conduct the workshops, and provide meeting summaries along with questions to be added to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that are available on the MPO website.

Displays at community events can include a booth or table set up where team members can speak with interested citizens, solicit participation in the survey and direct community members to the project website. Informational handouts can be distributed, including fact sheets and meeting flyers.

3.3.2 Public Hearing

A public hearing will be held at a regularly scheduled MPO Board meeting, and the comment period will be open for at least 30 days to allow ample time for the public to provide comments on the draft 2045 LRTP. The public hearing will be notified and advertised using a variety of the tools mentioned above.





4.0 Public Engagement Tracking and Effectiveness

4.1 Purpose

Federal legislation requires that MPOs periodically review the effectiveness of its public involvement process. The MPO is aware of the importance of assessing and evaluating public outreach efforts to meet federal and state requirements and ensure that outreach efforts are successful. This allows for improvement of existing efforts, continuation and enhancement of successful activities, the addition of new public involvement activities, and the opportunity to discontinue activities that have been deemed ineffective. If improvement strategies are identified, available resources include the Lee County MPO PIP as well as Chapter 5 (Public Involvement Tools and Techniques) of the 2018 FDOT Public Involvement Handbook.

4.2 Public Engagement Database

A public comment collection tool will be developed by the consultant team and will allow for the tracking of public outreach activities, participation levels, comments, and official staff responses to the comments received. All comments received will be entered into the tracking tool by the members of the consultant team or MPO Staff.

4.2.1 Evaluation and Monitoring of Outreach Activities

Statistics can be used to determine effectiveness when implementing all or a portion of the LPIP. Data can be extracted to represent the performance of a specific activity or the entire program. For example, the number of persons who attended a public meeting can be compared to the number of persons who were notified of that meeting.

This type of evaluation can be an indicator as to whether the tools used for public involvement are reaching the intended audience, and which tools generated a greater response. Statistical analysis is used to evaluate survey responses, and the results of the analysis are compared to evaluation measures to determine the rate of success of a specific public involvement tool.

The following measures of effectiveness may be used to determine the overall effectiveness of the 2045 Transportation Plan's development:

- Number/frequency of opportunities for public participation throughout the plan
- Number of attendees at various functions/activities vs. number invited
- Number of participating agencies/organizations
- Number of persons on the e-mail list vs. number of returns via e-mail
- Number/location of newsletter distribution sites
- Number of interactive survey and/or website hits
- Number of requests for presentations/meetings and locations
- Number of comment forms/cards distributed vs. comments received
- Number of comments addressed
- Number of issues identified
- Number of requests for materials in alternative formats
- Number of new contacts placed on the contact list
- Number of planned community events and type





In addition, event participation will be based on historical attendee totals, type of event, opportunity at event for meaningful interaction between staff and attendees, and staff availability.

A staff debriefing will take place after the public workshop or outreach event. All project team members will be encouraged to participate because each one will bring a different perspective and provide valuable insights on how to improve future public outreach efforts.

The debriefing is also an opportunity to review the evaluation and comment forms, and discuss comments heard by the project team. This discussion provides additional insight into community values and concerns. A written summary of the debriefing would also be beneficial to select stakeholders.

4.2.2 Effectiveness of the Public Involvement Process

As a pathway to continually striving for improved public involvement, changes should be made to increase public awareness and improve the quantity and quality of information provided to the public. This can be achieved in two ways: analysis and evaluation.

Analysis (the creation of comment categories, organization of comments into common themes, and identification of key ideas, trends, and sentiments) will include summarizing and displaying public comments in a way that maximizes the information available to decision makers and the public about what was said throughout the development of the 2045 LRTP.

4.3 Plan Development to Implementation

The process of developing the 2045 LRTP should consider:

- What needs to be done to track progress over the next five to ten years or longer
- How the public gain access to performance information
- How the Plan sets the stage for continued engagement that links planning with
- project development
- What on-going communication with decision-makers and the public will occur

Engaging the public and stakeholders in a cooperative manner should be a continuous process both throughout the development of the plan, as well as between plan cycles. Performance reporting efforts can help convey information about progress and keep stakeholders involved with the latest developments in transportation. This allows participants in outreach activities to draw explicit connections between their comments, the suggestions they provided, and changes that have been implemented.

