



BOSTON REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Jamey Tesler, MassDOT Secretary and CEO and MPO Chair
Tegin L. Teich, Executive Director, MPO Staff

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 26, 2023
TO: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
FROM: Stella Jordan, Public Engagement Program Manager
RE: Summary of FFY 2022 Public Engagement Activities

1 INTRODUCTION

Beginning in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2022, the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO's) Public Engagement Plan (PEP) included a commitment to documenting the engagement activities conducted over the past FFY. This memorandum describes those activities and explores metrics related to the effectiveness of the MPO's public engagement efforts. Staff will also look to the future and outline areas for continued improvement of the Public Engagement Program.

During FFY 2022, the MPO made progress toward its goal of expanding and deepening the Public Engagement Program. In January of 2022, the MPO created a new Communications and Engagement team, led by a Manager of Communications and Engagement and staffed by a Public Engagement Program Manager and a Communications Coordinator. This investment in staffing has given the MPO increased capacity, allowing for more deliberate strategic engagement planning and the tracking and evaluation of the effectiveness of its efforts.

1.1 Current Program

The creation of the Communications and Engagement team demonstrates the MPO's commitment to equitable engagement in the region. With the increase in staff capacity, the MPO has the resources to begin the process of expanding the Public Engagement Program to include deeper engagement with advocates, community-based organizations, and members of the general public, particularly those who have historically been underrepresented in transportation planning and disproportionately impacted by planning outcomes.

Engagement activities conducted during FFY 2022 were guided by the principles described in the Public Engagement Plan of transparency, inclusion and equity, early and continuous public involvement opportunities, relationship building with

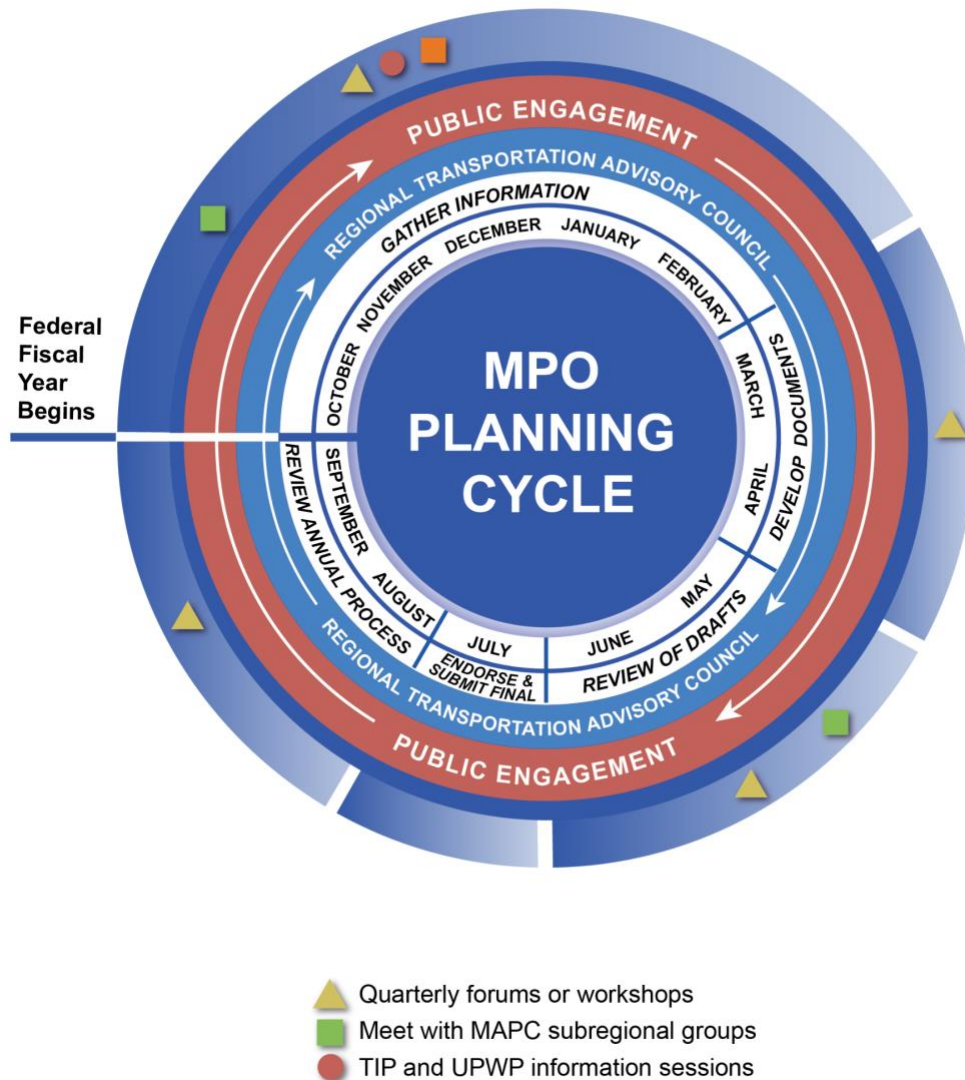
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diverse community members, and continuous evaluation and improvement. The MPO is committed to fostering a robust and inclusive engagement program that ensures that all members of the public—including those who have been underserved by the transportation system or have lacked access to the decision-making process—are given the opportunity to participate in the transportation planning process.

1.2 Timeline of Engagement Processes in FFY 2022

Each year, the MPO is required to update the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Every four years, the MPO must update the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Engagement for the next LRTP, *Destination 2050*, began in 2019. Development processes for all three certification documents took place in FFY 2022, the period between October 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022. The Public Engagement Program supports the development of these documents by ensuring that, at a minimum, the MPO meets federal requirements for inclusive public participation, including seeking public feedback at key points in the decision-making process.

Figure 1
Annual Planning Cycle for Development of the
TIP and UPWP, and Public Engagement



MAPC = Metropolitan Area Planning Council. TIP = Transportation Improvement Program. UPWP = Unified Planning Work Program.
 Source: Boston Region MPO staff.

Additional activities in FFY 2022 included engagement for two transportation equity studies, three corridor studies, support to the Transit Working Group and Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Advisory Council), and continuous building and strengthening of relationships with municipal, agency, advocacy, and community stakeholders. Engagement staff also sought to connect engagement activities and strategies across programs and projects through comprehensive feedback tracking and information sharing, facilitating connections among stakeholders and other MPO staff, and developing holistic and forward-looking engagement strategies that prioritize relationship-building and continuous public involvement in the MPO's work.

2 COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

The Communications and Engagement team employs a variety of strategies and tools. These include meetings and events, social media, email, the MPO website, and surveys. These tools not only support efforts to publicize and involve stakeholders in the MPO's work, but also help staff track and evaluate the effectiveness of the engagement activities.

2.1 Social Media

Staff use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to advertise MPO events and meetings, and publicize engagement opportunities, such as surveys and public comment periods. These platforms also provide space to network and build relationships with advocates, nonprofit organizations, municipalities, and other agencies throughout the region. Staff track engagement on social media by views, likes, and shares, and use this information to adjust communications strategies as needed.

Twitter is the MPO's most popular social media platform. In FFY 2022, staff posted 168 tweets to the @BostonRegionMPO Twitter account, which received 73,184 total impressions. Our most widely seen and engaging tweets were about large MPO-funded projects, discrete transportation studies completed by staff, and communications advertising a forum staff participated in.

Recordings of public events, such as MPO board meetings and open houses, are hosted on the MPO's YouTube channel, where staff can direct public inquiries about past events, refer back to public comments, and track how many times videos are watched. The MPO has received a total of 3,046 views on all recorded FFY 2022 meetings and events posted to YouTube. A caveat to video viewership statistics is that videos are often reviewed by MPO staff to review meetings and events and transcribe minutes and summaries, so some views are generated by staff.

2.2 Email

Staff use the MailChimp platform to manage email lists, sort contacts by topic of interest or geography, and send timely communications about MPO engagement opportunities, including messages about upcoming meetings and events and details about public comment periods for certification documents and amendments. In FFY 2022, staff sent 98 emails via MailChimp that were opened 75,418 times.

2.3 Website

On the MPO's website (bostonmpo.org), staff maintain webpages with materials about the history, purpose, role, and structure of the MPO, and information on MPO programs, processes, and engagement opportunities. The Public Engagement Program page contains detailed information on ways to engage, including an accessible, plain-language guidebook. The website can be translated into a variety of languages, and translations of executive summaries of core MPO documents—as well as versions in both PDF and HTML format—are available in six languages.

A key part of the engagement function of the website is the MPO calendar, where events and engagement opportunities are posted in a timely manner along with reference materials, details about how to join meetings, and instructions for requesting accommodations. Meeting minutes and links to recordings are posted on the calendar after events occur. The website also contains information about the MPO's social media accounts, how to sign up for email lists, and how to submit public comments.

2.4 Surveys

Staff use surveys to gather feedback during studies and program development. All MPO public surveys include optional demographic questions in order to track and evaluate the distribution of responses and provide information that allows staff to adjust engagement strategies. When advertising surveys, staff use demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau and MassDOT's [Engage](#) tool to understand the demographic nuances of our intended audiences, especially the prevalence of languages other than English spoken in particular areas. This enables staff to distribute translated materials efficiently and effectively, and ensure surveys are accessible to all audiences.

Staff use demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources to explore and illustrate existing transportation inequities in the context of engagement for studies. These data are often integral to studies and are a useful tool in conversations with stakeholders about the MPO's work.

During FFY 2022, Communications and Engagement staff deployed three public surveys to support data collection for UPWP-funded corridor and intersection studies. These surveys were translated into four non-English languages, selected for their prevalence in target communities in the study areas. Staff received a total of 1,373 individual responses on all surveys conducted in FFY 2022. Detailed information about FFY 2022 surveys can be found in Section 4.3: Corridor and Intersection Studies.

3 ENGAGEMENT BY PROGRAM

Staff seek to continuously improve the Public Engagement Program by expanding engagement efforts beyond what is federally required for MPO certification documents and the continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative (3C) planning process. This work includes developing creative and innovative strategies to reach diverse audiences, seeking broad participation in MPO events, and collecting feedback on those events. It also involves prioritizing activities that build and strengthen relationships and trust with communities throughout the region, particularly those that are harder to reach and typically less represented in the MPO's planning processes.

Figure 2 illustrates the broad categories of stakeholders that staff engage, organized by proximity to the MPO planning process. Beyond the board, municipal and agency stakeholders (such as municipal TIP project proponents, partners at the Metropolitan Area Planning Council [MAPC], and transit providers) are traditionally the most closely connected to the MPO's work. Established advocacy and community organizations, and the general public (including smaller community-based groups and associations) are the furthest removed from core MPO planning processes. The Public Engagement Program seeks to reach and collaborate with all of these stakeholder types, and recognizes that more effort, resources, and strategic planning are needed to effectively engage the outermost circles.

Figure 2
Public Engagement Stakeholder Categories and Proximity to MPO Planning Process



Source: Boston Region MPO staff.

While each type of stakeholder and each program and process requires different engagement approaches, the overall methods—grounded in the prioritization of strong stakeholder relationships, diverse perspectives, and meaningful opportunities to participate and provide input—remain constant.

3.1 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

To support the development of the FFYs 2023–27 TIP in FFY 2022, engagement staff worked with the TIP manager to organize and host a series of public meetings, workshops, and events; publicize public comment periods to solicit feedback; and continuously track, tag, and respond to public comments.

Staff held two TIP open houses in May of 2022, engaging a total of 14 people. Staff also facilitated TIP development discussions with municipalities, agency partners, subregional and Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) groups, the Advisory Council, and transportation advocates. Including petition signatories, the MPO received a total of 1,292 comments on the FFYs 2023–27 TIP during FFY 2022.

Eighty-four individual comment letters were received during the FFYs 2023–27 TIP public comment period, and four petitions with a combined 1,129 signatures. An additional 79 comment letters were received prior to the official public comment period.

Staff cataloged each comment during the TIP development process, providing timely responses, tracking and organizing comments by project, and presenting comments to the MPO board to support decision-making.

Staff also supported engagement on eight amendments to the FFYs 2022–26 TIP during FFY 2022 by publicizing public comment periods for each amendment, tracking and organizing feedback to be shared with the MPO board, and providing timely responses. The MPO received seven comment letters during public comment periods for amendments to the FFYs 2022–26 TIP.

3.2 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

To support the development of the FFY 2023 UPWP in FFY 2022, staff facilitated one UPWP open house in August of 2022 and multiple conversations about UPWP development with the Advisory Council, subregional and municipal groups, and transportation advocates. The MPO received three comments on the FFY 2023 UPWP during FFY 2022.

Staff also supported engagement on two amendments to the FFY 2022 UPWP during FFY 2022 by publicizing public comment periods for each amendment,

tracking and organizing feedback to be shared with the UPWP Committee and MPO board, and providing timely responses. The MPO received no comments during public comment periods for amendments to the FFY 2022 UPWP.

3.3 Public Engagement Plan (PEP)

Unlike the other certification documents, the PEP, which guides the Public Engagement Program, does not have regularly scheduled update requirements, but is amended on an as-needed basis. Staff made two updates to the PEP during FFY 2022. The first was an internal update that changed the name of the plan and program from “Public Outreach” to “Public Engagement,” in response to a comment from a member of the public stating that the word “engagement” more accurately described a continuous outreach process. Staff agreed that engagement is a concept that better reflects the MPO’s commitment to an open, accessible, equitable, and continuous public process.

The second was a procedural amendment to the public comment process for UPWP amendments, which allows the MPO board to waive public comment periods for minor budgetary amendments at the UPWP Committee’s recommendation. Staff received one letter during the public comment period for this PEP amendment, and staff met virtually with the commenter to discuss the amendment prior to sharing the comment with the MPO board during the endorsement vote.

3.4 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP): *Destination 2050*

The development of the MPO’s LRTP spans multiple years, with engagement activities throughout. In FFY 2022, engagement for the LRTP focused on identifying current and future transportation needs and opportunities for improving transportation in the Boston region.

Staff collected and documented transportation needs and priorities from municipalities in each MPO subregion (see Section 5.2 for more detail), and tracked and compiled comments from stakeholders across all MPO programs, projects, and processes that are relevant to the LRTP. Feedback from website form submissions, verbal comments at MPO board meetings, and discussions with municipalities and advocates are some examples.

Staff particularly sought to include perspectives from individuals and groups representing a broad range of demographic and community types throughout the region in the LRTP Needs Assessment, so staff emphasized engagement with historically underrepresented communities about their transportation needs. Staff have organized feedback that will shape the LRTP Needs Assessment by theme

and have assigned equity tags (i.e., minority, environmental justice [EJ], limited English proficiency [LEP]) where applicable. The collection and analysis of this information is coordinated across engagement, equity, and planning staff to support information sharing, assess the effectiveness of engagement efforts in reaching various audiences, and shape strategies to continuously improve qualitative data collection.

Staff also shared information about the relationship between the newly adopted Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the LRTP development process at a panel session hosted by the Boston Society for Architecture/MA American Planning Association (APA) Transportation Division in May 2022.

4 DISCRETE STUDIES

4.1 Addressing Equity and Access in the Blue Hills

The Communications and Engagement team led the scoping and management of a UPWP-funded discrete study in FFY 2022 to explore the issue of inequitable transit access to the Blue Hills Reservation, a large state park south of Boston. This study was proposed to MPO staff by a coalition of advocates seeking solutions to improve access to the Blue Hills from nearby transit-dependent southern Boston neighborhoods including Mattapan, Dorchester, Roxbury, and Hyde Park.

Engagement staff used this study as an opportunity to strengthen relationships with advocacy and community organizations, including those who proposed the study, and to test a new approach to public involvement in MPO studies through the formation of an advisory group made up of advocates, agency partners, and municipal staff that met throughout the study to guide its development and provide feedback at critical points. Staff held five advisory group meetings, 12 follow-up conversations with individual members of the advisory group, and eight meetings with other community-based organizations and neighborhood associations during the study.

Staff concluded the study with the publication of an interactive [StoryMap](#), which provided detail on engagement feedback, additional research, and analysis of current access to the Blue Hills, including inequities of access for the majority-minority and substantially low-income and transit-dependent communities in the study area. The StoryMap also includes a series of transit improvement options designed by staff and stakeholders, and a discussion of next steps for access improvement, intended to be an ongoing resource for stakeholders.

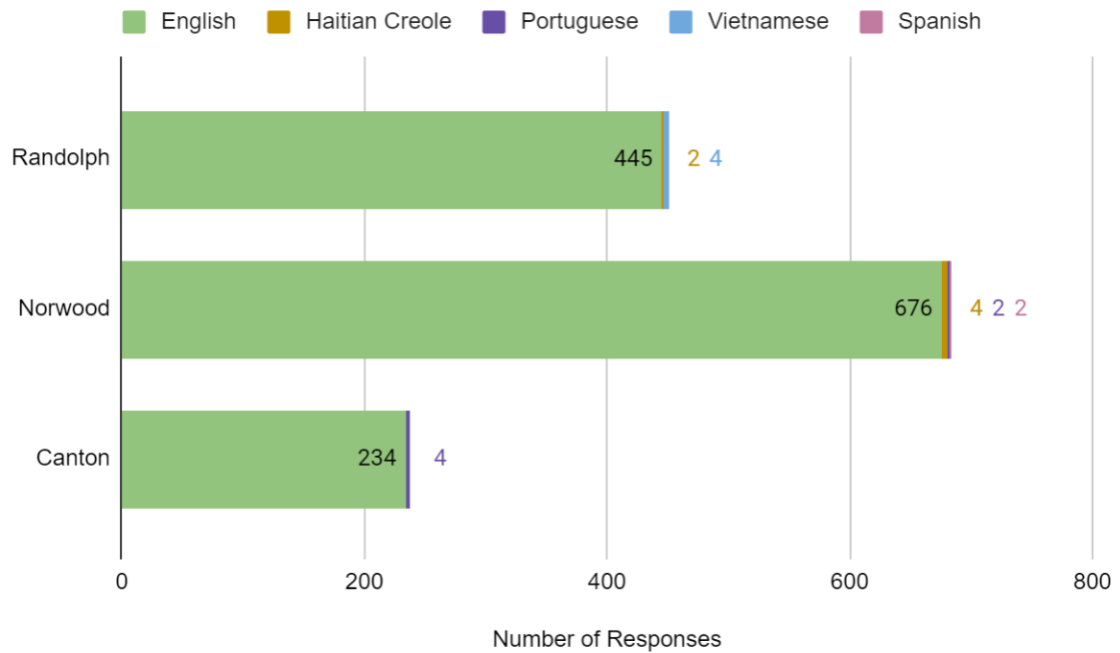
4.2 Identifying Transportation Inequities in the Boston Region

Engagement staff supported another UPWP-funded discrete study to explore destination access and transportation cost analyses throughout the region. This study also arose in part through previous stakeholder feedback and advocacy urging the MPO to more deeply investigate and incorporate data in MPO decision-making on existing transportation inequities. Staff held eight conversations with advocacy and community organizations and attended two RCC meetings during the study. Input from these conversations shaped the metrics selected by staff for analysis and the array of final products created, including interactive data tools. Engagement and equity staff continue to plan post-study follow-up engagement for both this and the Blue Hills studies, with an emphasis on deepening our relationships with the stakeholders who participated in the studies.

4.3 Corridor and Intersection Studies

Engagement staff supported three corridor and intersection studies during FFY 2022: a safety and operations study for an intersection in Randolph and corridor studies in Norwood and Canton. Engagement for these studies centered on public surveys. Staff helped create and publicize surveys for each study, with translations determined by study area demographics and municipal staff input. The Randolph survey was translated into Vietnamese and Haitian Creole; the Norwood survey was translated into Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole; and the Canton survey was translated into Portuguese. Figure 3 illustrates response data for each survey.

Figure 3
FFY 2022 Corridor and Intersection Study Survey Responses by Language



Source: Boston Region MPO staff.

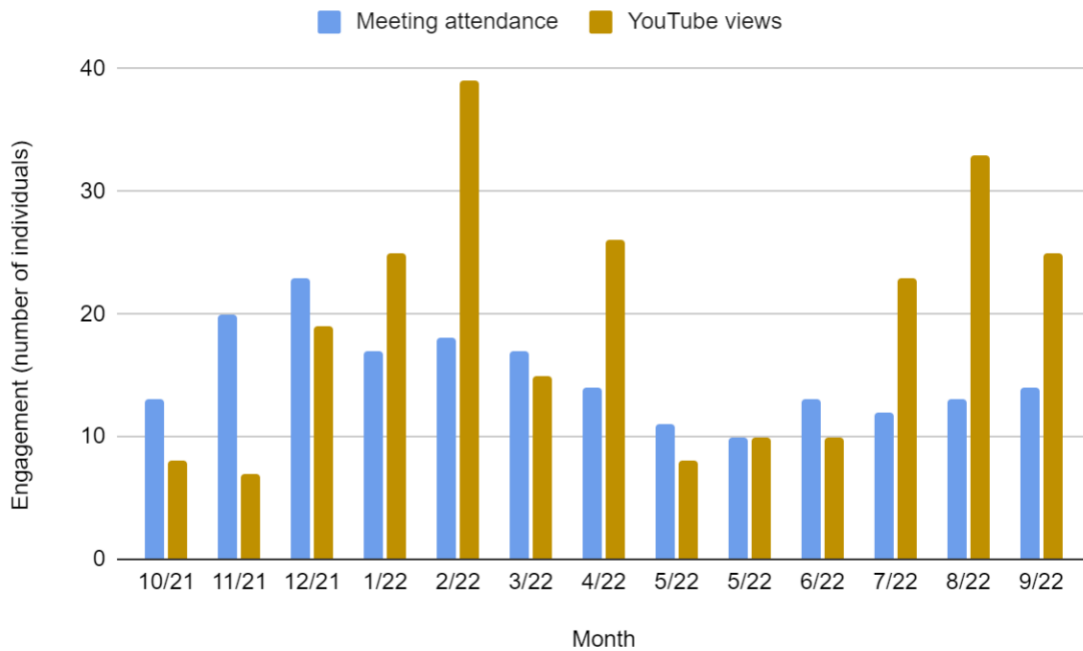
5 PUBLIC AND MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Regional Transportation Advisory Council

In the second half of FFY 2022, staff support for the Advisory Council was formally integrated into the Public Engagement Program to reflect the Advisory Council’s role as a stakeholder convener and conduit for public involvement in the MPO’s work. Engagement staff took on the responsibility of coordinating monthly meetings, working closely with Advisory Council leadership to provide opportunities for Advisory Council members to participate in MPO program development, provide feedback on MPO processes, and advance public engagement activities.

During FFY 2022, staff coordinated 13 Advisory Council meetings (one meeting per month with an extra meeting in May) with an average attendance of 17 individuals representing municipal, advocacy, business, and community interests. The recordings of these meetings were viewed a total of 248 times on YouTube, with an average of 19 views per video.

Figure 4
Advisory Council FFY 2022 Meeting Attendance and YouTube Views



Source: Boston Region MPO staff.

In late FFY 2022, staff focused on administrative organization to support improved coordination with Advisory Council members and began developing strategies to expand and diversify Advisory Council membership in the next FFY. Staff also worked with Advisory Council leadership to identify a goal of producing a set of educational materials to build awareness of the MPO and its work and build capacity for broader public engagement with the MPO; planning for this continues into the current FFY.

5.2 Subregional Meetings

To support data collection for the LRTP and its Needs Assessment and communicate development schedules and engagement opportunities for the TIP and UPWP, staff coordinated meetings with groups representing the MPO’s subregions. These groups meet regularly, supported by MAPC staff, to discuss subregional priorities and coordination. Discussions with the subregional groups provided MPO staff insight on municipal and subregional transportation needs, concerns, and priorities.

MPO subregional engagement activities normally happen in the fall and often span two FFYs. At the beginning of FFY 2022, staff attended meetings for the Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC), Three Rivers

Interlocal Council (TRIC), South West Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP), North Suburban Planning Council (NSPC), and North Shore Task Force (NSTF) subregions, and two meetings of the 495/MetroWest Partnership. In addition to annual subregional engagement, staff seek to maintain strong relationships with subregional groups throughout the year. So, staff regularly attend additional subregional meetings and meetings of the RCCs active in the Boston region.

In addition to meeting annually with the MAPC-facilitated subregional groups, MPO engagement staff also facilitate a separate group of transportation professionals from the Inner Core Committee (ICC) subregion, which meets roughly quarterly. ICC Transportation meetings provide staff with an opportunity to engage directly with this group, provide timely updates about MPO activities, and program presentations and discussion topics that support collaboration, coordination, and innovation in transportation planning across Inner Core communities.

Staff held four ICC Transportation meetings in FFY 2022, with a total of 64 attendees from Inner Core municipalities, advocacy groups, and partner agencies; the average attendance per meeting was 16.

5.3 Transit Working Group

The Transit Working Group brings together transit providers and professionals in the Boston region to discuss coordination, shared challenges and solutions, and the incorporation of transit interests into MPO planning and decision-making. Through the Transit Working Group, staff engage with regional transit authorities (RTAs), transportation management associations (TMAs), municipalities that operate transit services, state transportation agencies, and advocates. In FFY 2022, staff held a total of 18 Transit Working Group events with a total attendance of 492 (some individuals having attended multiple meetings).

In total, MPO staff held the following Transit Working Group events during FFY 2022:

- Four quarterly meetings
 - Total attendance: 158
 - Average attendance: 40
- Thirteen coffee chats
 - Total attendance: 207
 - Average attendance: 16
- One microtransit forum
 - Total attendance: 127

Materials from past meetings and events, including written summaries, are available on the [Transit Working Group web page](#).

5.4 Relationships with Advocacy and Community Organizations

Building and strengthening relationships with advocacy and community organizations throughout the region is a central part of the Public Engagement Program and is critical to the efficacy of other engagement activities.

In total, engagement staff held over 26 one-on-one or small group meetings with advocacy and community organizations during FFY 2022. Engagement staff additionally held four advisory group meetings for UPWP studies and attended four external events hosted by advocacy and community groups and two meetings hosted by RCCs.

6 GOALS FOR FFY 2023

Moving into FFY 2023, engagement staff look forward to continuing to develop innovative and data-informed strategies to expand and deepen engagement. The tools outlined in this memorandum to track and evaluate engagement activities remain central to the program, and staff will continue to build on and refine them to increase effectiveness.

A key area where this will play out is the identification of gaps in engagement. Public engagement activities conducted in FFY 2022 were effective in capturing the feedback of municipalities, transit providers and practitioners, and transportation advocates. The metrics for program engagement activities summarized above are supported by internal data on specific individuals and affiliations, which illustrate a high level of repeat participation—in other words, the people we are most effective in reaching are those who are already highly engaged with MPO processes.

This points to a larger imperative for the Public Engagement Program in FFY 2023: to shift resources to prioritize engaging stakeholders who have not previously engaged with the MPO and expand engagement activities that support the inclusion of communities that are less represented in the planning process. To reference the stakeholder graphic in Figure 2, engagement in FFY 2023 should continue looking outward, and prioritize advocacy and community groups and members of the general public—the outermost circles, or the stakeholders who are the furthest away from the MPO planning process.

This can be accomplished through ongoing efforts to strengthen relationships with stakeholders throughout the region, build trust in communities that have

traditionally been difficult to reach, and continue to innovate on strategies to educate the public about the MPO and its work. These efforts emphasize quality over quantity when it comes to engagement, in recognition that a thoughtful conversation can be worth much more in the long run than total clicks, views, or survey responses, particularly with respect to the demographic distribution of people engaged. Staff have identified EJ and LEP communities as under-engaged groups that will be a focus of FFY 2023 activities.

Specific goals for FFY 2023 include:

- Expanding partnerships with community-based and civic organizations to better reach EJ and LEP communities
- Continuing to build stakeholder relationships by holding more frequent meetings with advocacy and community groups
- Deepening stakeholder connections through continuous and robust engagement in UPWP studies, from scoping through post-study follow-ups
- Creating opportunities for in-person engagement in harder-to-reach communities to complement virtual engagement methods
- Improving relationship management and engagement tracking methods by continuing to explore new tools and identify best practices
- Building staff capacity for additional engagement work in order to meet our FFY 2023 goals

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) operates its programs, services, and activities in compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and related statutes and regulations. Title VI prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives federal assistance. Related federal nondiscrimination laws administered by the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, or both, prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, and disability. The Boston Region MPO considers these protected populations in its Title VI Programs, consistent with federal interpretation and administration. In addition, the Boston Region MPO provides meaningful access to its programs, services, and activities to individuals with limited English proficiency, in compliance with U.S. Department of Transportation policy and guidance on federal Executive Order 13166.

The Boston Region MPO also complies with the Massachusetts Public Accommodation Law, M.G.L. c 272 sections 92a, 98, 98a, which prohibits making any distinction, discrimination, or restriction in admission to, or treatment in a place of public accommodation based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or ancestry. Likewise, the Boston Region MPO complies with the Governor's Executive Order 526, section 4, which requires that all programs, activities, and services provided, performed, licensed, chartered, funded, regulated, or contracted for by the state shall be conducted without unlawful discrimination based on race, color, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, creed, ancestry, national origin, disability, veteran's status (including Vietnam-era veterans), or background.

A complaint form and additional information can be obtained by contacting the MPO or at http://www.bostonmpo.org/mpo_non_discrimination.

To request this information in a different language or in an accessible format, please contact

Title VI Specialist
Boston Region MPO
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
Boston, MA 02116
civilrights@ctps.org

By Telephone:

857.702.3700 (voice)

For people with hearing or speaking difficulties, connect through the state MassRelay service:

- **Relay Using TTY or Hearing Carry-over:** 800.439.2370
- **Relay Using Voice Carry-over:** 866.887.6619
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For more information, including numbers for Spanish speakers, visit <https://www.mass.gov/massrelay>.