



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County

Program Title: Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation Program

Program Category: Transportation

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher J. Shorter

Title: County Executive

Signature: 

Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation Program

VACo 2023 Achievement Awards

Executive Summary

The Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation program launched during unprecedented times and yet despite the significant barriers to public outreach and engagement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Transportation's innovative and committed approach has resulted in award worthy achievements over the two years since the program began. This includes launching the County's first dedicated communications campaign for a transportation project, being the first agency in the Commonwealth of Virginia to host a virtual public information meeting for a transportation project and providing over 20 mobility public presentations to County governing and advisory bodies.

The program has effectively utilized the public input obtained through this enhanced outreach and participation and translated to action. For example, the scope of an active road project in Prince William was recently substantially expanded and altered in direct response to program feedback to include a pedestrian bridge, in addition to the grade separated interchange for vehicular traffic, to facilitate better pedestrian and bicycle connectivity. It is one of many examples of how feedback from the public or elected officials representing the public, is being more effectively reflected in the planning and delivery of mobility solutions.

The program has successfully enhanced level of citizen participation and information provided to facilitate effective policy making and improve the administration of mobility in Prince William County. More importantly, the Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation continues to evolve, adapt and expand to build on these achievements and improve results.

Overview

The Prince William County Department of Transportation Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation program was launched in 2020 to improve public outreach and engagement and develop processes that incorporate the input received to improve policy making and administration of mobility solutions in the County. The global pandemic and subsequent economic downturn have presented enormous challenges for the program, however, it has also highlighted the need for government to be innovative, adaptive and committed to keeping the community informed of, and active participants in, the planning, funding and implementation of transportation. The Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation program has achieved these goals by developing a program that essentially functions as a feedback loop, allowing the results of initial initiatives of the program to inform future efforts. This has resulted in significant achievements in communications, public participation and public feedback driven policies and projects.

Challenge

Transportation is consistently cited as one of the top quality of life issues for residents in Northern Virginia. This region, part of the Metropolitan Washington area, ranks among the worst in the nation in traffic congestion and travel time reliability, resulting in significant costs to residents. A 2019 analysis of U.S. Census data ranked Prince William as the sixth highest County in the nation in economic costs of commuting. The report found that Prince William residents on average spend 338 hours commuting each year and spend nearly 17 percent of their income on transportation expenses. In addition to the time and monetary impacts of transportation, there has been a growing focus in Prince William on transportation's role in other key areas pertaining to

quality of life, including land use, equity, and climate. It is therefore not surprising that residents identify a high functioning transportation system as an integral element to quality of life.

Transportation projects are also a significant investment of public resources; accounting for approximately 75 percent of Prince William's five-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

Although the County Department of Transportation (DOT) has an aggressive grant program that has secured over \$600 million in grant funding annually in the last couple of years, Prince William voters overwhelmingly approved a 2019 bond referendum authorizing up to \$300 million for five major mobility projects to further advance transportation projects. Given the central role of transportation in resident quality of life and the substantial investment of public funds, Prince William County Department of Transportation (DOT) identified a need to enhance and expand public outreach and input in all aspects of the transportation process. This led to the Department launching the Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation program in 2020.

Description of the Program

The Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation program has taken a multifaceted approach to improving public outreach and input into the decision-making and administration process of transportation projects. The first focus of the program was to enhance communication between DOT and the governing body of the County, the Prince William Board of County Supervisors (BOCS). In 2020, five out of the eight members of the Prince William BOCS were first time elected officials. The program launched a series of BOCS work sessions focusing on key functions of DOT, including long range planning, grant funding and project programming, right-of-way acquisition and delivery of capital infrastructure projects. These work sessions were designed to be interactive, allowing BOCS members to get hands on experience of Department functions. For example, BOCS members were provided DOT's project prioritization form for grant

applications and encouraged to self-score their District's respective project priorities against the criteria on the list to determine how the project would score in a Countywide prioritization. Criteria included inclusion of project in long range plans, multimodal aspects, existing funding, and prior Board approval. In addition to the work sessions, which continue to be developed based on key Department functions and evolving issues, DOT provides Quarterly Reports to the BOCS on active transportation projects. These reports were substantially enhanced under the program to include not just major capital projects, but updates on transportation planning studies, grant applications, smaller safety and operational improvements, bicycle and pedestrian projects, neighborhood traffic calming and streetlights. Additionally, DOT collaborates with transit agencies operating in the County to include information on their local projects in the Quarterly Reports to provide a comprehensive update of mobility in Prince William.

The program has also extended this level of communication and engagement to the Prince William County Planning Commission. This Commission has traditionally advised the BOCS on land use matters but there has been growing recognition of the dependent relationship between land use and transportation in Prince William and under this program, the Planning Commission is now actively included in transportation planning as well. In addition to receiving similar work sessions and project update reports as the BOCS, DOT regularly presents to the Planning Commission on upcoming transportation funding opportunities and the development of the Mobility Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. Both BOCS and Planning Commission meetings are open to the public and recorded for public record, so these aspects of the program facilitate enhanced transparency and more informed decision-making for both the advisory and governing bodies of the County, as well as the public.

Second, the program has enhanced direct communication and engagement between the public and DOT. Public outreach has always been a part of transportation projects in the County, but it was limited largely to legally required public notices and hearings. These types of outreaches typically occur when a transportation project is already in the design phase and is not conducive to early public engagement, where there is greater potential to incorporate feedback. With the launch of the program, the focus has shifted to earlier and more proactive public outreach and engagement. The first project under this program was the Route 28 Bypass project. This is an approximately \$300 million-dollar, eleven-year project to construct about 3.5 miles of four lane roadway connecting Prince William to a neighboring jurisdiction, that will carry significant local and regional traffic volumes and will impact numerous residential properties. Following the completion of the planning study and Board endorsement of the preferred alternative in 2020, for the first time ever, the County hired a dedicated communications consultant for a transportation project. The consultants have provided support to DOT in developing a communications plan, project website and hosting public information meetings. DOT leads all efforts to ensure there remains direct communication between residents and the County, however, the consultant's communications expertise has been incredibly valuable in implementing the enhance public participation activities of the program. For example, they provided support in launching "Transportation Tuesdays" which are a series of short public meetings held on a semi-regular basis at lunch time on a Tuesday to discuss specific project areas of public interest in depth. To date, there have been four Transportation Tuesdays held on the following topics: Environment, Design Timeline, Right-of-Way Overview and Meet the Design Team. Additionally, there have been four public information meetings held between selection of project alternative and start of design phase. This is very atypical for a transportation process and demonstrates significant enhancement and expansion of public outreach

and participation. All recordings of public meetings and resources conducted under the program are easily accessible on the project website available at <https://route28bypass.com/> .

The communication channels used to promote the Route 28 Bypass meetings, as well as other transportation public meetings, has also expanded under the program. With assistance from the County Communications Office and our regional partners, including the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, DOT is leveraging social media platforms and using geofencing technology to target outreach to areas near proposed projects. Additional communication methods include use of variable message boards in the project vicinity, radio stations, recorded videos posted online and aired on local broadcast and an interactive map that allows residents to view information on all active transportation projects in the County.

Under the program, DOT has also implemented more innovative, grassroots outreach activities to advance diversity, equity and inclusion. In developing the communications plan for the Route 28 Bypass project, DOT interviewed key stakeholders that have existing ties to the communities in the project vicinity that are difficult to reach through traditional channels, including non-English speaking communities. Stakeholders interviewed included church leaders, immigrant advocacy and support organizations and property management for a large mobile home community in the project area. Based on these interviews, key areas, including grocery stores, churches, and schools, were identified to conduct “feet in the street” handing out of flyers and engagement of community members. Members of DOT personally hand delivered flyers written in both English and Spanish to every resident of the mobile home community in advance of a public information meeting. Additionally, project information is available in both English and Spanish on the project website and all public information meetings have had Spanish translators to enable live questions and answers from Spanish speaking participants. Given that 25 percent of Prince William residents

identify as Hispanic or Latino and 33 percent speak a language other than English at home, according to U.S. Census data, enabling communications in Spanish is critical to ensuring equity in public participation.

Finally, the program established dedicated communication points of contact to streamline communication processes. DOT staff are assigned to handle communications for specific projects or functions of the Department of Transportation and specific email addresses are created so that inquires or comments, whether from the public, BOCS, media or staff from internal or external agencies, go directly to the designated staff. These specific email addresses are included on project websites, public information meeting materials and other outreach materials. This ensures direct communication with designated staff and that information provided is accurate, consistent, and efficient.

Historically, periods of economic downturn are accompanied by corresponding cuts to public programs and services. In this case, DOT has grown the Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation program amid, and in part due to, economic uncertainty caused by the ongoing pandemic. As noted previously, transportation projects are significant investments of public funds. In times of economic uncertainty, there is greater attention to expenditure of funds and greater need to prioritize projects for prudent investment and in return, a greater need for transparency and participation. Additionally, the pandemic has caused a shift in transportation priorities in the County, with greater public emphasis on recreational walking and biking and less attention on commuter focused transportation. To address this shift, and take a more comprehensive multimodal approach to transportation, the Transportation Chapter of the County's Comprehensive Plan is in the process of being updated and incorporating recreational trails into a new Mobility

Chapter. This change further exemplifies how the public engagement program is facilitating a more adaptive and responsive Transportation Department.

Cost of the Program

The vast majority of the program has been developed and implemented using existing Department Resources. Since the launch of the program in fiscal year (FY) 2020, the Department’s staffing level has remained at 48 full time employees. The Department’s budget has increased by 21.5 percent, however, that increase is primarily attributed to increased contractual services for the capital improvement projects and not the program activities.

Expenditure and Revenue Summary



Expenditure by Program	FY18 Actuals	FY19 Actuals	FY20 Actuals	FY21 Adopted	FY22 Adopted	% Change Budget FY21/ Budget FY22
Administration	\$205,176	\$190,828	\$185,552	\$140,951	\$142,360	1.00%
Capital	\$16,882	\$90,429	\$10,420	\$222,959	\$372,959	67.28%
Planning & Programming	\$4,446,150	\$4,740,054	\$4,375,121	\$4,739,125	\$5,036,275	6.27%
Total Expenditures	\$4,668,208	\$5,021,311	\$4,571,093	\$5,103,035	\$5,551,595	8.79%
Expenditure by Classification						
Salaries & Benefits	\$5,073,557	\$5,337,019	\$5,914,995	\$5,332,586	\$5,529,749	3.70%
Contractual Services	\$78,480	\$75,018	\$28,553	\$192,390	\$442,391	129.94%
Internal Services	\$234,491	\$267,721	\$310,083	\$265,650	\$265,650	0.00%
Purchase of Goods & Services	\$1,924,141	\$1,993,944	\$1,928,338	\$2,197,294	\$2,197,294	0.00%
Capital Outlay	\$0	\$138,206	\$26,888	\$116,094	\$116,094	0.00%
Leases & Rentals	\$7,062	\$8,247	\$7,928	\$46,272	\$46,272	0.00%
Reserves & Contingencies	(\$2,945,227)	(\$3,177,099)	(\$3,812,647)	(\$3,214,207)	(\$3,159,194)	(1.71%)
Transfers Out	\$295,705	\$378,255	\$166,956	\$166,956	\$113,339	(32.11%)
Total Expenditures	\$4,668,208	\$5,021,311	\$4,571,093	\$5,103,035	\$5,551,595	8.79%
Funding Sources						
Permits & Fees	\$1,235,002	\$1,653,168	\$1,421,592	\$1,804,246	\$1,804,246	0.00%
Miscellaneous Revenue	\$0	\$24,900	\$0	\$0	\$0	-
Non-Revenue Receipts	\$1,637	\$3,221	\$8,913	\$0	\$0	-
Other Local Taxes	\$0	\$10,538	\$21,910	\$0	\$0	-
Charges for Services	\$9,326	\$20,435	\$20,097	\$12,483	\$12,483	0.00%
Transfers In	\$240,000	\$190,000	\$272,959	\$272,959	\$672,959	146.54%
Total Designated Funding Sources	\$1,485,966	\$1,902,262	\$1,745,470	\$2,089,688	\$2,489,688	19.14%
(Contribution to)/Use of Fund Balance	\$448,780	\$176,472	\$209,336	\$60,360	\$4,201	(93.04%)
Net General Tax Support	\$2,733,462	\$2,942,578	\$2,616,287	\$2,952,987	\$3,057,706	3.55%
Net General Tax Support	58.55%	58.60%	57.24%	57.87%	55.08%	

Staff History by Program



Direct costs of the program for the consultant support of enhanced communications for the Route 28 Bypass project totaled nearly \$2 million. The contract for these services is for a four-year period from 2020-2023 and is less than 1 percent of the project’s total cost. By securing approximately \$96 million in grant funding for the project, the County was able to allocate local general funds to the enhanced public participation activities of the program.

Although the program activities require additional costs and burdens on existing resources, the benefits substantially outweigh the costs. Additionally, the Department has been able to expand activities over the two-year life of the program while maintaining a flat budget by continually incorporating lessons learned and public feedback into the development of the program for improved efficiency and effectiveness.

Results/Success of the Program

Prince William County Department of Transportation’s Enhancing Transparency and Public Participation in Transportation program has seen great success in public outreach and engagement since launching in 2020. The program has developed and presented 20 work sessions and quarterly

reports to the Prince William County governing body and advisory body to enhance transparency and decision-making in the planning, funding and implementation of local transportation projects. The table included in the supplemental materials details the wide range of mobility topics covered and further speaks to how the program is expanding Department functions that these bodies are actively engaged in.

Work Sessions		
		Department of Transportation & Mobility Partners Overview
Board of County Supervisors	28-Jan-20	Mobility Bond Projects
Planning Commission	4-Mar-20	2020 Mobility Projects
Planning Commission	22-Jul-20	Capital Improvement Program
Planning Commission	4-Nov-20	Infrastructure & Facilities Plan
Board of County Supervisors		Comprehensive Plan Amendment Route 28 Widening
Supervisors	9-Feb-21	Life Cycle of a Transportation Project
Planning Commission	7-Apr-21	Transportation Planning Projects
Planning Commission	21-Jul-21	Transportation Grants and Funding
Planning Commission	15-Sep-21	Comprehensive Plan Mobility Chapter Update-Policies and Action Strategies
Planning Commission	3-Nov-21	Transit in Prince William County
Planning Commission	15-Dec-21	Upcoming Transportation Grant Opportunities
Planning Commission	12-Jan-22	SMART SCALE Grant Funding Program
Planning Commission	6-Apr-22	Future Transit Alternatives

Session Participants	Session Registrants	Event	Date
87	152	Project Status and Meet the Design Team Transportation Tuesday	2/22/22
220	N/A	Right-of-Way Info Session	6/2/21
26	57	Right-of-way Process Transportation Tuesday	5/25/21
35	65	Design Process & Timeline Transportation Tuesday	4/27/21
33	76	Environmental Impact & Concerns Transportation Tuesday	3/23/21
437	N/A	PWC Project Update Info session	2/18/21
224	N/A	PWC and Fairfax Joint Info Session	12/7/20

Listserv Registrants	Unique Website Visitors Last 90 Days
353	English Site: 2.8K users Español Site: 18 users

The dedicated points of contact established through the program have been highly successful in enhancing the efficiency and transparency of communications. Prince William is in the process of renaming U.S. Route 1 within the County; an undertaking that will impact 940 addresses, mostly commercial, on over 12 miles of roadway and requires coordination between eight County agencies. DOT was tasked with handling all public inquires and developed a project website (<https://www.pwcva.gov/department/transportation/route-1-renaming>) with comprehensive project information, timelines and frequently asked questions, as well as a dedicated project email address (Rt1renaming@pwcgov.org) with assigned staff that monitors the account, directs the inquiry to the appropriate County agency and provides follow up communication. All emails receive an initial response within 24 hours and are resolved within 5 business days. Additionally, a report of emails received, and staff responses are sent to County leadership weekly to ensure transparency and help inform decisions in this ongoing process. The success of the program has been recognized with a 2022 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties (NACo).