

CHAPTER 2. Community Involvement

TransVision

The desire of the community to preserve the natural and physical attributes that characterize Anchorage is strong. Safe and effective management of transportation within, into, and out of our boundaries is recognized as a major issue affecting quality of life, particularly in light of continued local and regional population growth.

The community responded to the challenge of shaping future transportation by joining in a community involvement process named **TransVision**. Through a proactive public involvement process, Anchorage residents contributed in a dedicated, vocal, and active manner to the development of this LRTP. TransVision provided complete, informed, and timely public notice and full public access to key decisions. It also supported early and continuing community involvement.

TransVision Shaped the LRTP

TransVision actively solicited and incorporated input from residents, the business community, civic leaders, and government partners to ensure that policies, projects, candidate improvement scenarios, and recommended actions would serve all

transportation stakeholders to the greatest extent possible.

The LRTP shaped by TransVision recognizes the diversity of the region's transportation needs and attempts to balance often-competing needs. It also addresses issues of growth and preservation of the natural environment. Development of the LRTP focused on how land use and transportation choices achieve the community vision outlined in the Anchorage 2020 comprehensive plan (2001), including a healthy environment and economy, livable neighborhoods, and mobility options.

Issues and considerations conveyed to the public for input during development of the LRTP included the following:

- Addressing projected east-west transportation system stress across the Anchorage Bowl
- Improving public transportation, bicycle, and pedestrian travel choices

- Managing the effects of huge traffic volumes from the Mat-Su Borough on the Glenn and Seward highways and on city streets
- Effectively integrating multimodal transportation elements that sustain and enhance economic vitality
- Maintaining safe and satisfactory service standards through cost-effective roadway improvements



- Blending community and transportation planning to achieve more attractive neighborhoods and livable communities
- Preserving and maintaining the existing transportation infrastructure
- Identifying policies and funding sources capable of sustaining and building facilities
- Investing in transportation system management technologies and systems

TransVision Components

Broadly disseminating information and obtaining community-wide public input through a proactive process of engaging the public genuinely shaped development of the LRTP. Major public participation elements are described below, and a complete Public Involvement Activity Log is available on the website (www.muni.org/transplan).

Transportation Forum

In September 2003, a meeting in the heart of downtown, at the Performing Arts Center, served to kick off the public process and provide early public involvement. The TransVision Forum brought together the community, 16 transportation exhibitors, keynote speakers, the Mayor of Anchorage, transportation experts, and print and television media for an open conversation about long-range transportation issues and the future of Anchorage and the region.



Roundtable Committee

Members of a 40-person citizen Roundtable Committee drawn from a broad cross section of the Anchorage community; academic, environmental, youth, institutional, and interest groups; and business leaders were appointed by Mayor Mark Begich and the DOT&PF Regional Director. This group met on more than a dozen occasions in extended committee and subcommittee meetings. The Roundtable Committee provided guidance and counsel throughout the TransVision process, addressing transportation system issues, articulating goals and objectives, assessing alternative scenarios, and providing recommendations. The Roundtable Committee was charged with communicating the information received to their community

constituents and gaining constituent input on the transportation issues identified. A complete list of Roundtable Committee members is available on the website.

Stakeholder Interviews

Formal and informal stakeholder interviews were used to assist the TransVision team in compiling a comprehensive list of transportation-related issues. Issues were categorized into groups to form a foundation for developing transportation strategies. The stakeholders interviewed included community organizations and special interests: neighborhood groups, AMATS, public transportation, business, economic development, trucking, information technology systems, DOT&PF, the military, resource agencies, Port of Anchorage, Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (TSAIA), Alaska Railroad Corporation, emergency responders, Tribal groups, University of Alaska, MOA staff, design professionals, and bike and pedestrian advocates.



Technical Oversight Committee

Members of the Technical Oversight Committee were charged with ensuring that sound technical procedures, best-practice travel modeling and up-to-date analytical tools were applied. This team of engineers, planners, community members, national transportation representatives, and air quality professionals provided technical and methodological review. The committee also examined background data, transportation model output and processing of the model output, and information technology system deployment. In addition, the Technical Oversight Committee commented on the peer review summary of the Anchorage Travel Model.

The two-day Peer Review was held through the Transportation Model Improvement Program sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration and included panelists from Arizona, Oregon, and Colorado Metropolitan Areas. A complete list of



Photo courtesy of Brooks & Associates

Technical Oversight Committee members is available on the website.

Community Councils

TransVision planners met with the Anchorage Federation of Community Councils and presented information to individual community and neighborhood organizations. These community forums updated the community regularly on the progress of LRTP development and solicited input.

Open House Meetings

The Transportation Forum public meeting in September 2003 began the open house public discussion. The next open house meeting was held in April 2004 to report to the community the findings from evaluating the performance status of the current transportation system. Participants also were again asked questions to determine public sentiment about the tradeoffs and priorities to meet current and future transportation needs.

Additionally, in April and May of 2005, five open-house meetings were held in four quadrants of the city and one in Chugiak- Eagle River. The meetings focused on seven main transportation issues: building a highway-to-highway connection, creating better transit service, strengthening our road network, easing the Glenn Highway commute, making it easier to walk and bike around the city, using our system more wisely, and living up to the Anchorage 2020 comprehensive plan. The open houses provided opportunities to comment on potential transportation strategies and preliminary recommendations. Team members, MOA staff, and



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DOT&PF staff were on hand to discuss the issues and to solicit and collect comments.

An ongoing TransVision practice of speaking to community gatherings and to business and professional organizations was enhanced through dedicated outreach. Presentations to more than 40 community groups solicited input before the Draft LRTP public release.

All meetings, including Roundtable Committee and Technical Oversight Committee meetings, were open to the public.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were formed to study and receive input on specific topics, including freight, land use, transit, bike and pedestrian issues, and trails. Industry representatives, local users and officials, and interested Roundtable Committee and Technical Oversight Committee members participated in the meetings focusing on the specific

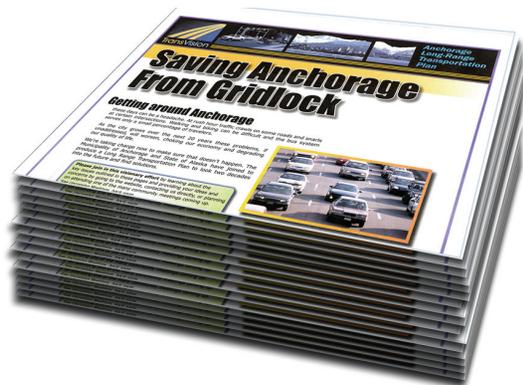
issues, impacts, costs, integration of different modes of transportation, and land use.

Electronic Communication

Throughout the LRTP development, a hotline providing information and recording comments has been available. The hotline was updated periodically to announce current meeting times and locations. The AMATS website was also updated periodically to announce meeting opportunities and provide project documents as they became available. Both forms of communication allowed members of the public who were unable to attend meetings or presentations to keep abreast of the progress and submit comments. E-mail was used to alert members of organizations and public contacts about upcoming participation activities and to widely share project information.

Media Distribution

Media campaigns publicized upcoming opportunities for public participation. Paid radio and newspaper advertising, as well as public



service announcements from major local media outlets, broadcasted notifications to inform the public of the process and upcoming events. More than 50,000 copies of *Saving Anchorage from Gridlock*, a publication that outlined major transportation issues and solutions, were distributed across the Anchorage area as an insert in the *Anchorage Daily News*. The insert also advertised the date, time, and location of the five open houses hosted in April and May 2005. In addition, 4,000 copies of this publication were distributed to public locations and community meetings, and on People Mover buses.

Radio, television, and print media interviewed many members of the team developing this LRTP and Roundtable Committee members in live and recorded interviews and statements about TransVision components, specific issues, and LRTP progress.

Reaching Out to the Underserved

The youth voice represents the future end users of the transportation system in 2025. Elementary students were interviewed about their views on transportation topics from our bike trails to traffic jams. Their ideas and perspectives were shared in a video presentation at the TransVision Forum and at a subsequent Roundtable Committee meeting. In addition, a 2-hour session with representatives from Anchorage high school government leadership and a project representative collected input from the students on the future of Anchorage transportation. The Roundtable Committee also included a youth representative who actively participated throughout the process.

Minority population outreach was accomplished in conjunction with the DOT&PF Office of Civil Rights through a direct mail campaign to their resource list of more than 100 minority organizations, churches, and businesses throughout the Anchorage area. Concerted attempts were made to actively engage residents of traditionally underserved areas – Fairview, for example – to ensure that the concerns and comments of these individuals were heard. To listen to and meet with residents, project staff attended many community council meetings in the target neighborhoods at each stage of the planning process.

Policymaker Participation

Updates and work sessions involved Mayor Begich, the Anchorage Assembly, the AMATS Policy Committee, and the MOA Planning and Zoning organization as well as other local, state, and federal transportation officials. The active involvement of these policymakers served to provide informed communications to their constituencies as well as returning vital feedback to the project team.

Summary

The extensive public outreach described in this chapter was undertaken with one goal in mind – to make better decisions about the future of transportation in Anchorage. The input from our community has resulted in not only viable technical solutions, but livable, credible, responsive solutions for all of Anchorage.