CHAPTER 1: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Public engagement is a critical part of the planning process, and if done correctly, will result in a strong, resilient transit development plan. The public engagement process for Connect NW Arkansas began in March 2019 and will continue through the plan development phase until the plan is presented for adoption in early 2020. Together, Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC), Ozark Regional Transit (ORT), and Razorback Transit (RT) used several strategies throughout the engagement process to ensure a broad audience was reached and given an opportunity to provide input about what works well with transit today and what needs improvement. The goal of the Public Engagement Plan for Connect NW Arkansas is to:

“Create an interactive and engaging process that enables the public to provide input, learn about the benefits of transit, and help shape the future of a connected transit system for Northwest Arkansas.”

Online engagement, a public survey, and in-person meetings were the core elements used to gain insight into the transportation needs and desires within the NWA community. This engagement process involves two main phases. The first phase consisted of public engagement events along with a public survey. The second phase will involve a similar strategy with the goal of gathering input on the scenarios and recommendations that the team produces using the results of the first phase public engagement effort coupled with a technical analysis. Figure 1.1 shows the timeline for the public engagement process as well as the steps that have been completed to-date.
FIGURE 1.1: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

1. **Education & Engagement**
   - **Spring 2019**
     - Survey
     - Community Events
     - Stakeholder Meetings

2. **Technical Analysis**
   - **Spring-Summer 2019**
     - Develop Transit System Alternatives
     - Analyze Community Input

3. **Review Alternatives**
   - **Fall 2019**
     - Community Events
     - Community Presentations

4. **Refine Alternatives**
   - **Fall-Winter 2019**
     - Refine Transit System Alternatives
     - Analyze Community Input

5. **Finalize Plan**
   - **Winter 2019**
     - Community Presentations
     - Adopt Plan
WHO IS THE “PUBLIC?”

This plan is not just looking for existing transit riders to fill out a survey; rather, it will engage a variety of groups listed below:

- **The General Public:** The team will engage with anyone throughout the NW Arkansas region to develop an understanding of the state of transit, and how we can improve it. ATG and the project team will look to capture the input that helps us improve transit for existing users and makes it more appealing for non-users. The plan will be exhaustive and ensure that the Transit-Dependent and Target Rider Population’s input is captured by making the process accessible to everyone. This can be done by working with community leaders who represent these populations and can serve as a voice for their concerns and desires.

- **Key Stakeholders (see Appendix A for list):** The project team will keep an open dialogue with the key stakeholders to ensure that they are a part of the process and can serve as stewards for the TDP with the community. More information on Stakeholder Outreach is located below.

- **City Leadership:** Each city plays a crucial role in the region. It will be paramount to learn about the transit needs of each city so that the team can develop customized solutions for each of the following communities:
  - Bentonville
  - Bethel Heights
  - Fayetteville
  - Johnson
  - Lowell
  - Rogers
  - Springdale

- **Universities:** The two major higher education organizations in the region influence transit trips through high demand by students, faculty, and staff. Outreach to these groups will be an important aspect of this plan. Engagement will occur with the following institutions:
  - NW Arkansas Community College – Students, Faculty and Staff
  - University of Arkansas – Students, Faculty and Staff

- **Major Employers:** The team will reach out to major employers throughout the region to learn about the travel patterns of their employees, and how they can better connect them to the community. ATG staff will document in detail concerns and feedback from stakeholders regarding their respective organizations. For a list of major employers in Northwest Arkansas, see Table 1.1.

- **Transit staff and leadership:** No one knows or sees more than the front-line team dedicated to delivering transit service to the community. The PEP will ensure that staff and leadership from each transit agency and the MPO has helped frame the current state of transit and provided input to help shape the future of transit for the region.
TABLE 1: NORTHWEST ARKANSAS MAJOR EMPLOYERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>INDUSTRY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bentonville School District</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cargill (Springdale)</td>
<td>Food Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayetteville School District</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JB Hunt</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKee Foods (Gentry)</td>
<td>Food Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy Hospital</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozark Mountain Poultry (Rogers)</td>
<td>Food Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAM Transport</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers School District</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simmons Foods (Siloam Springs)</td>
<td>Food Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springdale School District</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyson Foods</td>
<td>Food Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walmart</td>
<td>Retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Regional Medical Center</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN OBJECTIVES

To accomplish the goal set out by the PEP, the following objectives have been established. These objectives are specific actions that will contribute to fully realizing the PEP goal.

- Develop an understanding of the current state of transit for the region and each individual community.
- Gain a deeper understanding of how the community uses the existing transit system.
- Educate the public about the freedom associated with great transit and the tools needed to achieve it.
- Enhance a shared awareness throughout the region about benefits associated with transit investment.
- Present sustainable, and implementable transit solutions in a simple and transparent way that demonstrate the benefits, and drawbacks associated with each proposed option.
- Develop a shared understanding with the public about how each proposed transit option will impact the community.
- Make recommendations that are informed by the public engagement process, customized for each community, and result in a regional transit system that provides freedom of movement.
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

FIRST PHASE EVENTS

The first phase of public engagement events was held in NWA from April 2nd to April 6th. The project team coordinated nine public events throughout the region in a wide variety of locations meant to capture all types of transportation users (e.g. Fayetteville Farmers Market, Springdale Walmart, NWACC, etc.). The goal of the first phase of engagement events was to create a process that was interactive and provided opportunity for the public to provide input on transit, and for the public to learn about the benefits of transit, in order to better shape the future of the transit system in NWA. Figure 1.2 shows the events that happened during the first phase of engagement. Table 1.2 shows paper surveys that were received from each of the first phase events. The most surveys came from Union Station in Fayetteville on the University of Arkansas campus and in Downtown Bentonville during the First Friday event. Events were spread throughout the study area, and community members from all cities within the study area had an opportunity to leave input. The following provide a short description of each event.

University of Arkansas Baseball Game

The project team attended a baseball game at Baum-Walker Stadium to gather feedback on the transit system in Fayetteville and the connections to the region. 52 paper surveys were received at the event.

Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC)

NWACC is the regional post-secondary educational institution. The project team engaged students and staff in Burns Hall at the Bentonville campus and received 75 paper survey responses.

Walmart Supercenter

The Springdale Walmart acts as a transfer station for ORT buses. A transit bus was placed at the entrance to draw attention, and the project team received 40 paper surveys during the engagement event near the entrance of the store.
University of Arkansas

Union Station acts as the hub of the RT network and the project team received the most in person feedback at this location due to the large amount of transit transfer activity.

Promenade Shopping Center

A regional destination for shopping, the Promenade Shopping Center attracts residents from across the region. The project team stationed in a plaza space to engage the public and ask for input. 13 paper survey responses were received from this location. While this number of surveys is small it was an important event designed to capture input from non-transit users at a destination that currently doesn’t have transit service yet shows a high potential for transit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>SURVEYS RECEIVED</th>
<th>% OF TOTAL EVENT SURVEYS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Arkansas Baseball Game</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Arkansas Community College</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springdale Walmart</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promenade Shopping Center</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Friday Bentonville</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogeye Marathon &amp; Expo</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayetteville Farmers Market</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshallese Festival</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinco De Mayo</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Other</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Surveys from Events</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other surveys reflect those that were conducted while riding buses or surveys that were used without an event code.
First Friday Bentonville

A strong community building event, the First Friday celebration in the square of downtown Bentonville was a highly attended event with a multi-generational crowd. The theme of the First Friday was ‘Growing Greener’, which coincided perfectly with Connect NW Arkansas. The project team solicited feedback for nearly 8 hours and received 130 paper survey responses.

Hogeye Marathon Expo

The Hogeye Marathon is an annual event that happens in downtown Springdale and draws people from across the region. The Expo event occurred the evening before the race in the Jones Center, also in downtown Springdale. The project team engaged marathon attendees, families, and support groups, and received 30 paper survey responses.

Fayetteville Farmers Market

The project team attended the first outdoor Fayetteville Farmers Market of the year at the square of downtown Fayetteville. The event was well attended and received 43 paper survey responses.

Hogeye Marathon

Vendors at the Expo event also had an opportunity to attend race day events. The project team tabled along with other vendors at the after-race section of the event.
Chapter 1: Public Engagement

Marshallese Festival

The Northwest Arkansas Marshall Islands 38th Jemenei Celebration presented an opportunity for Connect NWA to gather input for the attendees of the festival and ensure that local Marshallese population had the opportunity to learn more about transit and provide input. Marshallese translated surveys were available during the Memorial Day weekend festival consisting of a kickoff event at the Jones center, field day games, a parade, and a pageant show where they crowned the Jemenei Day Pageant likatu.

Cinco de Mayo Festival

The project team provided Spanish surveys for the family oriented Cinco de Mayo celebration. This opportunity helped Connect NWA capture input from the Latino community while they enjoyed live entertainment, food from different cultures, games and booth vendor information.
EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT

A component of the public engagement process was to provide information to the public about what makes a great transit system, and the tools used to get there. This was done through a project fact sheet and a citizen's guide to transit. Both were available at every engagement event. Figure 1.3 shows the citizen's guide available at all events. The project team also took the opportunity at events to share information to the public in a face to face context about the tools used to create great transit. This helped provide the public a better understanding of how the transit system could be improved.

RIDING OZARK REGIONAL TRANSIT & RAZORBACK TRANSIT

Riding a transit system is an effective way to develop a local understanding of the transit system, and also solicit feedback directly from transit users. The project team did just that during the first phase of events in early April. Each route of each transit provider, Ozark Regional Transit and Razorback Transit was ridden to look for opportunities to improve route efficiencies and to encourage transit riders to provide feedback for Connect NW Arkansas.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

A critical strategy of this Public Engagement effort was to engage key community groups, employers, businesses and non-profits so that we could gather input from them and so that they could serve as a voice for their community and the people they serve and represent. Connect NW Arkansas coordinated with over 300 stakeholders. The following categories were included in this stakeholder engagement process:

- Businesses
- Chambers
- City staff and Representatives
- Community Partners
- Educators
- Elected Officials
- Employers
- Housing Developers
- Real Estate Investors
- Realtors
- State Legislators
- Visitors Associations

The project team met one on one with City Leadership from each of the four main cities in the fixed route study area and had a meeting with NWA Council where various major employers from around the region attended to learn more about Connect NW Arkansas and provide input about their specific transit needs. This meeting helped Connect NW Arkansas, NWAR Council and the major employers that attend develop a shared understanding how better connect and serve the region and the project team was able to capture feedback that will directly inform the development of recommendations.
A Citizen’s Guide to Transit Planning

The transit planning process should not be out of reach for Northwest Arkansas residents. A key component to Connect Northwest Arkansas is giving you the tools to understand what makes a great transit system and the ability to take part in the planning process. The purpose of this guide is to help you understand the key principles of transit planning. We hope this knowledge inspires confidence in evaluating how transit can work best for the region and encourages you to actively engage throughout the project.

○ Why does transit matter?

- **Save Money**
  A household can save $10k by living with one less car.

- **Reduce Congestion**
  Congestion costs Northwest Arkansas residents $103M per year. Transit helps reduce the number of vehicles on roadways.

- **Environment Friendly**
  Public transit saves the country 4.16 billion gallons of fuel per year.

- **Travel Safely**
  Transit is 10x safer than traveling by automobile.

○ What is great transit?

**Great transit...**

- **Takes me where I want to go**
- **When I want to go there**
- **It is reliable**
- **It saves me time**
- **It gives me freedom**

○ What supports great transit?

- **Density**
  Transit works best when stops are located near a variety of destinations where people want to go such as job centers, schools, medical facilities, & housing complexes.

- **Connectivity**
  Transit should provide seamless transitions to other routes, park & rides, sidewalks, and bicycle routes. This ensures ease and comfort for passengers navigating the system.

- **Ease of Use**
  Transit should be easy to navigate and convenient to use. Great transit is integrated with technology to make taking transit an easy choice for travel.

- **Community Support**
  Whether you advocate for transit at city hall or simply choose to ride the bus, support from the community encourages local leaders to invest in great transit.

○ How do you design great transit?

- **Frequency**
  How often the bus comes
  - 60 Minutes
  - 30 Minutes
  - 15 Minutes

- **Route Design**
  Where the bus goes and how it gets there

- **Span of Service**
  How early service starts & how late service runs
  - 6:00 AM
  - 8:00 PM

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Chapter 1: Public Engagement

DRAFT
A public survey developed by the project team acted as a backbone to the public engagement process. The survey allowed the project team to better understand the needs and desires of NWA residents. The survey consisted of fourteen questions with a combination of true or false, multiple choice, and one question for open responses. Questions ranged from demographic details such as race or ethnicity and annual household income, to specific questions about how respondents feel the transit system performs. The survey was available to take online in Spanish or English and on paper in either English, Marshallese or Spanish. Figure 1.4 shows the paper version of the survey that was available at each event. Survey results are listed in the public engagement results section below.
The NWARPC along with ORT and the City of Springdale hosted information for the TDP on their webpage. Each webpage contained graphics created by the project team, along with a link to participate in the online survey. A clip of the ORT webpage is shown below in Figure 1.5.

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**WEBPAGE**

**FIGURE 1.5: ORT WEBPAGE PROMOTING CONNECT NORTHWEST ARKANSAS**

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**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Project partners shared information about the TDP on their respective social media platforms which promoted the public survey and encouraged followers to attend events to leave input. Figure 1.6 shows a Facebook post by Razorback Transit promoting the event at Union Station and gives a link to the survey. Social media posts promoting public engagement for the TDP came from the following organizations:

- City of Springdale
- Ozark Regional Transit
- Razorback Transit
- Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission

**FIGURE 1.6: FACEBOOK POST BY RAZORBACK TRANSIT PROMOTING UNION STATION EVENT**

**University of Arkansas Transit & Parking**

COME ON BY - Connect Northwest Arkansas is at Union Station until 5 p.m. today. They would like your input on the future of transit in the region. Their survey is at connectnwar.questionpro.com
NWARPC promoted the first phase of engagement events and the public survey through a display in a local newspaper. The ad contains each of the nine events, along with a link to the public survey. Two newspaper articles were also written about the TDP by the Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette on January 24th and 28th. In addition, an editorial was published about the project in February by the same newspaper.

Large display boards were printed and used at all the events to help engage with the public and give context to the project. Boards included:

- **Project Overview**: Reviewed project timeline, Project study area, and elements that support great transit.
- **Route Design Preference**: Board asked if you prefer to walk less to your stop, or if you’d like your bus to come more often.
- **Local Service Map**: Each event has a map of transit service in the local area.

**PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT RESULTS**

**SURVEY RESULTS**

A total of 1,299 surveys were received by the project team. 491 online surveys were received, and 808 paper surveys were collected in person during the first phase of public engagement events. The project team analyzed responses to develop a graphic to easily depict key results from the public survey. Figure 1.7 shows a summary of key survey results. A majority of respondents get around by personal vehicle on a day to day basis, while 22% use RT and 9% use ORT. 24% also responded that they use a bike. Nearly 70% of respondents thought the transit system was reliable. When asked the type of trip respondents take or want to take on the bus, leisure (19%), work (18%), and shopping (17%) were all top responses.

One of the most important insights discovered from the survey was the fact that overwhelmingly throughout the region respondents would prefer more frequent bus service as opposed to walking less to their bus stop and having less frequent service. Nearly 70% preferred more frequent bus service. Figure 1.8 shows the different options in bus service frequency.

Concerns for survey respondents included trouble planning around transit schedules (63%), trouble accessing destinations from transit (48%), and transit trips taking too long (53%).
Public Survey Results for NWARPC 10-Year Transit Development Plan

**CONNECT NORTHWEST ARKANSAS**

**FIGURE 1.7: PUBLIC SURVEY KEY RESULTS**

**WHICH MODE(S) DO RESPONDENTS USE TO GET AROUND?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rideshare</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpool</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TYPE OF BUS TRIPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SURVEY RESPONDENTS PREFER...**

- Walking less to my bus stop: 31%
- More frequent bus service: 69%

**RESPONDENT CONCERNS**

- 63% have trouble planning around bus schedules
- 48% routes are not close enough to desired destination
- 53% bus trips take too long

**TIME SPENT TRAVELING**

- 31% 30 min or less
- 40% 30 min - 1 hr
- 21% 1 hr - 1.5 hrs
- 7% 1.5 hrs or more

**WHAT IS YOUR RACE or ETHNICITY?**

- 67% WHITE
- 13% HISPANIC/LATINO
- 3% AFRICAN AMERICAN
- 5% HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER
- 3% BLACK/AFRICAN NATIVE
- 5% ASIAN
- 2% AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE
- 12% of passengers do NOT have a DRIVER'S LICENSE
- 9% of passengers experience a DISABILITY
FIGURE 1.8: BUS SERVICE FREQUENCY OPTIONS

OPTION A

This figure shows the different options in bus frequency. The tradeoffs between the two options include the distance to walk to the bus stop and distance the bus must travel between the stop and the final destination. Comparing the two options shows that Option A returns a lower total travel time.

OPTION B

Total Travel Time

30 Minutes

45 Minutes
Open Responses

A total of 347 open responses were received from the last question of the survey. Open responses were received in English, Spanish and Marshallese. The project team looked for themes and patterns throughout the open response section as they analyzed the data. Themes were grouped and counted noting the number of responses received. Themes that arose most often throughout the open responses were:

- More frequent service
- Greater regional connections
- Train or light rail systems

Below is a sample of some of the responses from the open response section of the public survey.

“...There just aren’t any alternatives to driving in the Rogers/Bentonville area, let alone getting to Fayetteville without having to pay for an Uber/Lyft. I currently am unable to use the bus from where I live on the west side of Bentonville, but wish it were an option. Thank you for conducting the survey!”

“Frequent and reliable public transit from Fayetteville to Bentonville would make a big difference for many families.”

“Stoked to see public transit hit our area!”

RESPONDENT TRAVEL PATTERNS

The survey contained two questions asking where respondents live, and where they travel the most. Responses were in either zip code or city format. Zip code responses were assigned to a city using a percentage of the zip code within city limits. Table 1.3 shows responses for home and destination locations. By joining unique combinations of responses between cities, the project team created a matrix of the movement between cities, and where survey respondents traveled to most. Fayetteville had the most travel within a city at 308, while travel between Springdale and Fayetteville was the most between cities. Figure 1.9 illustrates survey respondent travel patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>HOME LOCATION</th>
<th>DESTINATION LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bentonville</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayetteville</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springdale</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,259</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,162</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

A thorough assessment of survey results, stakeholder desires, and public input at events concluded that residents of NWA are generally supportive and excited to see transit grow along with their community. They stressed specific concerns and needs as the system plans for development over the next 10-year period and beyond. A developing system must strive to improve reliability. It must also have greater frequency and greater regional connection between cities, as to be more convenient and to save transit user time. Local routes must also bring people to where they need and want to travel, with greater frequency and more direct and efficient routes.