



MEMO

TO: NWARPC Policy Committee
FROM: NWARPC Staff
DATE: February 12, 2026
RE: Forward 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)
Approval Process and Public Comments

BACKGROUND

The Forward 2050 MTP was developed by NWARPC and its planning partners to:

- Identify current and future transportation challenges and opportunities for the NWA region.
- Evaluate options for addressing identified challenges and embracing opportunities.
- Establish a shared vision and strategies to move the region forward.

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is federally required planning document for urbanized areas with populations greater than 50,000 and is updated every five years. Forward 2050, the Northwest Arkansas region's MTP, charts a course for the next 25 years. It serves as the blueprint for regional transportation investments and policies, guiding how Northwest Arkansas will plan, prioritize, and fund projects that keep the region moving. Forward 2050 provides a framework for coordinated decision-making, allowing local governments, state agencies, and transportation partners to align resources and priorities. The draft Plan and additional information about the planning process can be found at www.nwarpc.org/transportation/mtp/.

ENGAGEMENT & NOTIFICATION SCHEDULE

The following public engagement and notification schedule was completed in compliance with, and exceeding the requirements of, the NWARPC Public Participation Plan (PPP) for the draft *Forward 2050 MTP*:

Early Public Engagement: Two public open houses were held at the start of the MTP process:

- April 9, 2025 – Fayetteville Public Library (Spanish and Marshallese interpreters provided)
- April 10, 2025 – Bentonville Public Library

Public notices and press releases were distributed via newspapers of general circulation, media outlets, agency contacts, minority and human service organizations, the NWARPC website, social media, and the NWARPC office. Display ads were published in the *NWA Democrat Gazette* on March 30, 2025 and April 6, 2025 and *La Prensa Libre* on April 2, 2025.

Draft Plan Review: Draft chapters were presented to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) from September-November 2025 during their regularly scheduled monthly meetings. On November 20, 2025, the TAC voted to recommend the draft *Forward 2050 MTP* for public comment.

Public Comment Period: A 47-day public comment period was held from December 8, 2025, through January 23, 2026. Written comments were encouraged via email or through the comments tab online, www.nwarpc.org/contact/. The comment period was extended from the original close date of January 12 to January 23 to account for a temporary technical outage that briefly limited access to plan materials.

Final Public Open House: A public open house on the draft MTP was held on December 8, 2025, at the Jones Center in Springdale (Spanish and Marshallese interpreters provided).

Public Notification (Public Comment & Open Houses): Public notices pertaining to the public comment period and open house event were published in the *NWA Democrat Gazette* on November 9, 2025 and December 7, 2025, *La Prensa Libre* on November 12, 2025 and December 3, 2025, and *McDonald County Press* on November 13, 2025 and December 4, 2025. Display ads were published in the *NWA Democrat Gazette* on November 30 and December 7, 2025 and *La Prensa Libre* on December 3, 2025.

Other Notification & Outreach:

- Notices, press releases, and materials were distributed via email to federal, state, and local agencies, interested citizens, and the press.
- Letters were mailed in English and Spanish to human service agencies and Spanish-speaking churches announcing the public comment period and approval process.
- Ongoing website, social media, and in-office information availability; project updates were presented monthly at regularly scheduled monthly TAC and RPC/Policy Committee meetings.
- Staff tabled at several community events and presented Forward 2050 at several speaking engagements, including:
 - Urban Land Institute (ULI) Place Summit Infrastructure Workshop – November 21, 2024, Bentonville
 - NWA Real Estate Investors Group – February 11, 2025, Rogers
 - Sundays on the Square – March 30, 2025, Fayetteville
 - NWA Vulnerable Road Users Safety Summit – June 3, 2025, Fayetteville
 - Square to Square Bike Rides – May 3, 2025, and October 11, 2025, Springdale
 - Urban Land Institute (ULI) Place Summit Plenary – November 14, 2025, Fayetteville
 - Rogers Winter Farmers Market - December 6, 2025, Rogers

SUMMARY AND DISPOSITION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The public comment period for the draft Plan concluded Friday, January 23, 2026. Public comments were received from ten individuals and are summarized below. Verbatim comments are available upon request.

Note: Any technical suggestions, typos/scrivener errors, and comments on formatting recommendations that have been received are being reviewed for concurrence and implemented as applicable.

PUBLIC COMMENT THEMES	RESPONSE/ACTION
Need to study feasibility of implementing camera monitored HOV lanes on I-49 and for camera or drone assisted traffic law enforcement.	NWARPC has requested an ARDOT study to determine the feasibility of managed lanes on I-49 which could include high occupancy vehicle lanes to include a carpool lane. Arkansas State law currently prohibits the use of unmanned traffic enforcement systems, which includes both red light cameras and speed cameras.
Need for more digital public engagement strategies and increased options for public	NWARPC recognizes that public participation is an evolving process that adapts to the community's changing needs over time. NWARPC has made recent efforts to increase the agency's social media reach and visibility, including publishing notice of public comment periods on

PUBLIC COMMENT THEMES	RESPONSE/ACTION
comment submission regarding draft planning documents.	<p>multiple social media channels, which has driven an increase in public engagement across multiple planning projects. NWARPC will look to expand our use of digital public engagement tools to reach a wider audience when soliciting comments on future planning projects.</p> <p>NWARPC confirmed public engagement and notification schedule was completed in accordance with the adopted NWARPC Public Participation Plan (PPP).</p>
Lack of specific recommendations for Safe Routes to School (SRTS) planning and public education around distracted driving and roadway safety.	<p>While <i>Forward 2050</i> does not include Safe Routes to School (SRTS) as an explicit, standalone strategy, the plan references component plans and strategy guides that provide more targeted direction. The <i>NWA Regional Vision Zero Safety Action Plan</i>, referenced in Chapter 3, emphasizes the need for combined efforts focused on education, engineering, and enforcement strategies to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries. Chapter 6’s implementation matrix also prioritizes <i>Walk Bike NWA</i> bicycle and pedestrian catalyst projects that improve safe access to schools. Additionally, although <i>Safe Routes to School</i> is not a standalone funding program in Arkansas, multiple NWA communities have successfully used NWARPC Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding to support SRTS-related projects and programs.</p>
Lack of information about transit passenger safety and proposed transit stop improvements in the region	<p>While <i>Forward 2050</i> does not include detailed discussion of transit passenger safety or specific transit stop improvements, the plan references several component plans and strategy documents that provide more targeted guidance. The <i>Connect NWA Transit Development Plan</i> and <i>ORT Bus Stop Enhancements Plan</i>, referenced in Chapter 3, identify the need for improved transit stops and better ADA-compliant pedestrian access. Chapter 6’s implementation matrix prioritizes transit stop upgrades, connectivity improvements, and coordination with transit providers to advance passenger safety goals and update Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans.</p>
Need for recommending incentives for corporate employers to manage peak hour transportation demand through revised employee policies	<p>While <i>Forward 2050</i> does not include this theme as an explicit, standalone strategy, the plan references strategy guides that address this objective. The <i>Northwest Arkansas Energy & Environment Innovation Comprehensive Action Plan (EEI Plan)</i>, highlighted in Chapter 3 as a strategy guide, recommends a voluntary, incentive-based approach to collaborate with major employers in reducing the region’s greenhouse gas emissions. The <i>NWA Congestion Management Process (CMP)</i>, highlighted in Chapter 3, also recommends similar approaches to manage transportation demand that are identified as specific actions in the implementation matrix shown in Chapter 6.</p>

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Need for widening and improvement of Highway 412 to Siloam Springs with the possibility of implementing tolling along the corridor	US 412 improvements, future I-42 corridor, is currently designated as an unconstrained project. This designation reflects the significant funding gap between projected revenues and the total cost of all identified transportation needs across the region. Studying the feasibility of implementing US 412 improvements to include tolling represents one potential strategy for addressing this funding challenge. Chapter 4 introduces a proposed toll feasibility study for the Highway 412/Future I-42 corridor and identifies Future I-42 as an important long-term priority for the region.
Need for a study of Highway 12, East of Rogers, to determine need for safety improvements, including speed limit reductions	This corridor is included in the region’s High Injury Network and has experienced recent increases in average daily traffic (ADT). NWARPC will continue to coordinate with the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) and local jurisdictions regarding potential study requests, consistent with local and regional priorities and available resources.
Need for improvements to and expansion of Highway 62 to Prairie Grove	Improvements at the intersection of Arkansas Highway 127 & Highway 62 along the Highway 62 corridor are currently programmed in the 2040-2050 staging period. Observed average daily traffic on this segment has steadily increased, and the corridor has been identified as a local priority by elected officials.
Need for limited access highway to serve as a North/South connector between Bella Vista and Highway 412 and concern around environmental impacts of constructing a new North/South connector	Forward 2050 envisions a new arterial connector from I-49 between Greenland and West Fork to US 62 near Prairie Grove, with a potential extension to Highway 412, as the southern continuation of the Western North-South Connector currently programmed in the TIP/STIP. Findings from the ARDOT Western N-S Connector Study recommend the facility be developed as an arterial connector, not a fully controlled-access freeway (similar to Highways 112 and 265). This approach will prioritize the use of existing right-of-way and reduce potential environmental impacts. Corridor alignments have not yet been determined for any project segment, and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) clearance will be required before ARDOT selects a final alignment for any phase of the programmed corridor. Additionally, a planning-level study will be needed for the southern vision projects before projects move forward.
Need to preserve rail right of way and to pursue transit improvements before continuing investment in I-49 expansion	Forward 2050 recognizes the potential for passenger rail in the region, consistent with the <i>Arkansas State Rail Plan</i> , and supports a multimodal planning approach. The plan also emphasizes a balanced, forward-looking strategy that prioritizes multimodal options, coordinates across systems, and establishes a practical framework for advancing a high-capacity regional transit network over time.