



2020

Public Engagement Annual Report

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2020 provided many opportunities for DRCOG staff to engage Denver metro area residents and local stakeholders with its varied programs and services, as well as the opportunity to learn many lessons about virtual

engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report summarizes and evaluates major engagement efforts completed during 2020.



Census Hard-to-Count Outreach Grant

DRCOG received a grant from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs to conduct outreach and promote the census to older adults in the region. Many staff members and divisions contributed, particularly Communications and Marketing and the Area Agency on Aging. Main activities included the creation of an outreach toolkit for use by organizations throughout the region, convening a regional workgroup of stakeholders working to ensure an accurate count of older adults in the Denver region, as well as a significant amount of print, radio, and digital advertising. In addition, there was a significant amount of direct census outreach completed by Area Agency on Aging staff.

While DRCOG's outreach focused generally on the older adult population, its staff also targeted census materials to older adults who are a part of other hard-to-count populations. The toolkit included materials specifically designed for Latinx, veterans, rural, Native Americans and older adults with visual challenges. In addition, Area Agency on Aging contractors provided an array of services to various subsets of the older adult population in the region and helped widen DRCOG's reach throughout the metro area by sharing materials.

DRCOG leveraged its social media accounts for a robust campaign throughout the grant period, posting a total of 77 times between Feb. 1 and June 30 over four channels: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. In total, DRCOG's social media posts received over 35,000 impressions and 643 interactions, the majority of which were on Twitter.

As response rates became available, DRCOG staff also began targeting its census advertising to specific areas of the region with high populations of older adults and lower response rates. DRCOG used its census outreach map (developed and regularly updated by internal GIS staff)

to identify these areas, and then was able to target digital advertising in the last month of the grant to these areas.

As with the overall census effort, there were many challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in staff adapting strategies, including conducting and attending virtual meetings and pivoting from in-person outreach to digital advertising.

be counted.

Respond to your invitation to take the 2020 census.

Every 10 years, U.S. residents are invited to participate in a national census. Responding accurately to the questions in the census ensures that your **community** and its **residents** get the **resources they need**.

Starting in mid-March, most households will receive a **mailed invitation** to respond to the census. The invitation will also offer information on how to respond by **mail** or **phone**, or **online**. If you use a P.O. Box, a census taker will drop off your form at your home.

If you do not immediately respond to the census, you will receive several **reminders by mail**. From May through July, census takers will **follow up in person** at households that did not complete the census online or by phone or mail.

- March 12-20**
You will receive an invitation in the mail to respond to the 2020 census.
- Late March through April**
Households that have not responded will receive reminders in the mail.
- April 1**
Census Day (you will have received your census invitation by this date)
- May-July**
Census takers will follow up in person at households that did not complete the census online or by phone or mail.

Census data will determine funding that benefits people of all ages.

Be counted. Take the 2020 census.

United States Census 2020

we're in this together.

This spring, take the 2020 census.

Did you know funding for the community programs you care about is based on census numbers? Make sure you and your community are counted by responding to the 2020 census.

Respond online, by phone or mail.

be counted.

Learn more about the census at 2020census.gov.

United States Census 2020

Coordinated Transit Plan

DRCOG staff drafted the Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan (also known as the Coordinated Transit Plan) in 2020. Intended to be adopted in conjunction with the 2050 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan, staff relied heavily on stakeholder input while developing the Coordinated Transit Plan. The bulk of public engagement occurred during May and June.

In total, 138 people responded to an online questionnaire to inform the plan that was open from May 5 through June 22. The questionnaire focused on needs and gaps, current trends and strategic priorities for the plan. It was distributed through two eblasts sent to over 500 targeted stakeholders on DRCOG's mailing lists on both May 6 and May 20. DRCOG staff shared the link to the questionnaire during several local coordinating council and other local transportation group meetings during May and June. In addition, Area Agency on Aging staff shared the link with Accountable Health Communities program contacts and each county council on aging.

In several virtual meetings between May and June 2020, DRCOG staff provided an overview of the plan and administered an interactive poll with questions similar to the informal questionnaire described earlier. In total, staff received 120 responses. The meetings included several local coordinating councils, DRCOG's Advisory Committee on Aging, the Regional Transportation District Citizens Advisory Committee, and the Denver Regional Mobility and Access Council. DRCOG staff also provided an overview of the plan to the 2050 RTP advisory groups.

The input helped to inform the needs, gaps and current trends in the plan, as well as guided development of the plan's strategic priorities. DRCOG staff anticipates the Coordinated Transit Plan will be adopted as a part of the 2050 RTP in April 2021.

2040 RTP Amendment Public Hearing

A public hearing was held at the June 17 Board of Directors meeting on a proposed amendment to the 2040 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan and associated air quality conformity documents. The hearing was noticed in The Denver Post and posted on the DRCOG website 30 days before the hearing to allow for public comment on the proposed changes. The 2040 RTP amendment public hearing was the first DRCOG held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

DRCOG sent an eblast to nearly 900 recipients when the 30-day comment period opened; approximately one-third of recipients opened the email and about ten people clicked on the available documents. A summary cover page was created to increase user-friendliness of the documents. Most people chose to click the link that included the summary page first, suggesting that summary pages are preferable to users. A follow-up eblast reminding recipients of the hearing was sent on June 15.

Two social media posts with visual content promoted the public comment period on Facebook and Twitter. These posts had nearly 1,000 impressions and a relatively high engagement rate of about 5%. One comment was received via email and no one attended the virtual public hearing to testify. The amendment was adopted by the Board of Directors.

2050 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan

The development of the 2050 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan, or 2050 RTP, continued throughout 2020. Engagement for the 2050 RTP was split into four phases – phases two and three took place in 2020.

Advisory Groups

In late 2019, DRCOG staff formed two new advisory groups to provide guidance and input throughout the 2050 RTP plan development process. The groups reviewed

the components of the plan as they were developed, helped guide and develop public engagement activities, and provided comments and guidance to DRCOG's staff, committees and Board of Directors. The intent of both advisory groups was to hear, early on, the perspectives from people who have not been typically involved in the transportation planning process and have their guidance shape the plan.

The Youth Advisory Panel was convened to ensure that younger voices were heard during the plan development process. The panel convened high-school age representatives from DRCOG's member government youth boards and commissions throughout the region. In tandem, a Civic Advisory Group was convened to develop the plan with guidance from interested residents who represent the diversity of communities and experiences in the Denver region and who may not have previously participated in transportation planning.

In 2020, meetings with each of the advisory groups were held in February and March, May, September and December. Beginning in May, all meetings were held virtually. In 2020, the groups provided guidance and input on the measures and results of scenario planning efforts, project selection process, environmental justice and electric vehicles. Attendance declined somewhat for the virtual meetings compared to the first two in-person meetings. Details of the feedback and guidance received by each advisory group through the plan process are detailed in the public and stakeholder engagement appendix of the 2050 RTP.

Phase Two Investment Priorities Budget Activity and Survey

The primary effort of phase two of the 2050 RTP engagement process was to obtain input on investment priorities and scenario analysis. This took place in late May through June, and all engagement activities were conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. DRCOG staff built a budget activity on Social Pinpoint, its online engagement platform, and developed a short questionnaire. The engagement site also included short, recorded video presentations in both English and Spanish that described the scenario planning process and outcomes, comparison graphs, a handout and a description of the plan process.

Using the budget tool, community members were asked to choose the kind of transportation future (which scenario) they would fund with a \$100 budget. They could allocate portions of their budget toward the scenarios they thought should be priorities. A short survey asked respondents to rank their priorities for regional transportation goals, identify other goals, describe how they thought the investment priorities should be guided by the scenario results, and provide additional comments. A detailed summary of the responses can be found in the [phase two summary](#).

DRCOG used numerous eblasts and both organic and paid social media posts to promote the opportunity to provide input via the online engagement platform. Staff sent eblasts to about 1,700 recipients. The eblast had about a 30% open rate and more than 300 people clicked through to the engagement site.

In total, 12 social media posts garnered over 115,000 impressions (the majority of which were through three paid ads) with nearly 2,000 link clicks to the online engagement site. One of the paid Twitter posts was in Spanish and received a significantly higher engagement rate than the other posts, although the average engagement rate for all posts was nearly 5%.

The online engagement site received over 3,500 visits from over 1,000 unique users; of the visitors, 70 people completed the budget game and 74 filled out the follow-up survey.

DRCOG allocated funding toward paid social media advertising on Twitter near the end of June due to low response rates overall. While the paid social media advertising was successful at promoting the site and driving much more traffic to the site, it appeared that the eblasts were more successful at driving people to the site who ultimately completed the activity or took the survey. The timing of the engagement effort took place a few months into the pandemic and during widespread protests throughout the country in early summer. As a result, staff believes it would have been challenging to capture the public's attention, no matter the topic, given the competition for audience attention.

DRCOG staff developed a summary of engagement activities completed in phase two, as it had done for the previous phase in 2019. DRCOG sent the summary to more than 2,500 subscribers on its mailing list in late August. The eblast had an open rate of over 34% and about 160 people clicked on the summary.

Phase Three Stakeholder Engagement

The plan development in phase three was largely led by stakeholder input, taking into account the earlier guidance from the public in previous phases. Stakeholders, particularly member governments, provided guidance on how investment decisions should relate to Metro Vision targets and identified which targets they considered it most important to address. In addition, stakeholders helped evaluate whether the plan responded to public feedback and included projects that reflected the vision and priorities of the public.

Based on the 2050 RTP candidate project solicitation and evaluation process and criteria adopted by the DRCOG Board of Directors at its July 15 meeting, DRCOG staff worked with the county transportation forums and mountain counties to solicit and evaluate major multimodal candidate projects for potential inclusion in the fiscally constrained component of the 2050 RTP.



Photo Contest

Phase three engagement was largely stakeholder-focused as the plan was being drafted, but DRCOG staff did not want to lose momentum or the public's attention during the phase. To maintain interest and attention on the plan, DRCOG staff launched a transportation-themed photo contest through social media during phase three. Announcing the contest to more than 2,200 people through DRCOG's email distribution lists and many social media posts (including eight in December 2020), DRCOG staff asked the public to submit photos that captured the many modes of transportation in the region.

The contest ran from mid-December 2020 through mid-January 2021. In total, DRCOG received 219 photo submissions. DRCOG staff were invited to vote on the photo submissions to narrow the selection to five photos. Then, DRCOG announced the five finalists via another social media post and asked the public to vote on a grand prize winner through an online survey. The grand prize winner won a gift basket of products from businesses in the region. The five finalist photos were incorporated in the plan document's design.



Taking Action On Regional Vision Zero

Much of the public engagement that informed the Regional Vision Zero action plan, Taking Action on Regional Vision Zero, was completed in 2019. In 2020, the primary engagement efforts occurred during a public comment period prior to the plan's adoption in June.

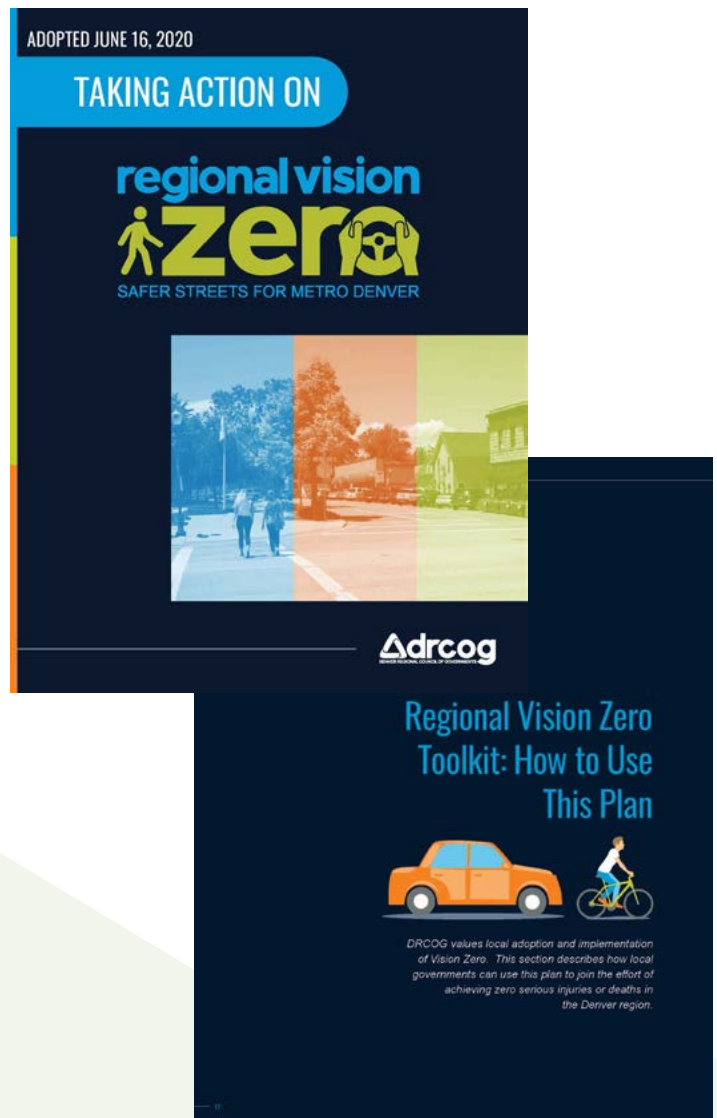
This project was one of DRCOG's first in which staff built an online engagement site using Social Pinpoint to facilitate public input, as well as one of the first projects soliciting engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff sent an eblast promoting the public comment period for both the Regional Vision Zero action plan and the freight plan on March 19 to more than 1,000 subscribers. This message had a higher-than-average open rate exceeding 37%. DRCOG sent another reminder eblast on April 13, prior to the Board of Directors consideration of the plan at its April 15 meeting. More of the eblast recipients clicked on the direct link to the draft plan than on the link to the online engagement site.

Timing of the Regional Vision Zero action plan engagement effort was difficult, as it was released right at the beginning of the pandemic. However, the engagement site still received over 500 visits from 220 unique users. Three people submitted comments through the engagement site. Six social media posts on Facebook and Twitter promoted the public comment period and received over 8,000 impressions and an average engagement rate of 2.68%. Several social posts incorporated the video that had been created by Communications and Marketing staff in 2019 to promote the Regional Vision Zero effort and received more impressions than other posts, especially on Twitter.

The Social Pinpoint site provided a link to the draft document through Dropbox. Dropbox's default settings allowed members of the public to easily mark up or comment directly on the draft document, and dozens of people used the feature to provide their comments. Although DRCOG staff had not intended to use

commenting, the experience informed future engagement efforts by revealing a tool members of the public might find useful for submitting comments on other projects.

DRCOG received about 200 comments on the plan. Taking Action on Regional Vision Zero was adopted on June 16. Plan implementation began shortly after plan adoption, with a Regional Vision Zero Working Group meeting monthly and planning for a Regional Vision Zero pledge campaign and larger public education campaign also beginning in 2020. Continued implementation will take place in 2021 and beyond.



Regional Multimodal Freight Plan

DRCOG staff promoted the Regional Multimodal Freight Plan through the joint eblasts described earlier in the Regional Vision Zero section. Similarly, staff developed an online engagement site using Social Pinpoint. This site received almost 300 visits from 105 unique users. However, no visitors left comments on the online engagement site. Six social media posts promoted the comment period and received over 4,000 impressions with a 2.63% engagement rate.

DRCOG received six comments on the draft plan, all through email. The Regional Multimodal Freight Plan was adopted by the DRCOG Board of Directors on May 20.

Regional Multimodal Freight Plan

Primary commodity flows by mode and direction are graphics on this page.

Over region's growing population and service, many more goods are imported into the region from the U.S. or overseas than are shipped out of the region. This imbalance can result in trucks, planes bringing goods in and leaving empty, and support manufacturing, distribution and natural resources as a core component of the regional economy. To reduce empty miles traveled and to support manufacturing, distribution and natural resources as a core component of the regional economy, DRCOG is working to improve the region's infrastructure and to support manufacturing, distribution and natural resources as a core component of the regional economy.

As of tons and billions of dollars in products that are shipped out of the DRCOG region, top commodities include petroleum, motor vehicles, gravel and sand, and field crops and grain represent the region's top commodities. Major manufacturers in key regional industry clusters rely on the freight system to reach customers and access global markets. Producers of milk, cheese, chocolate, pet food, beef and a range of natural and locally made food products are distributed across the region and shipped out to the rest of the country and world.

With over 3.2 million residents, 1.7 million workers, 119,000 businesses and 18 million visitors, the DRCOG region relies on the multimodal freight system to move millions of individual packages, products and parcels. In 2015, the total flow of goods into, out of and within the metro area equaled 211.8 million tons valued at \$218.7 billion. The majority of those goods, measured by total tonnage and value, traveled

position as a major distribution hub for the entire state and Mountain West region. Aerospace, pharmaceuticals, electrical and machinery equipment, and food products reflect the region's manufacturing strengths and business activity. Regional industry clusters, including breweries, generate significant freight activity. A large brewer such as Molson Coors ships out more than 1,500 truckloads and approximately 100 rail carloads of final product each week.

Tonnage of Goods by Directional Flow, 2015

Direction	Tonnage (millions of tons)
Outbound	66.9
Inbound	97.8
Interregional	47.3

Tonnage and Value of Commodities by Mode, 2015

Mode	Tonnage (millions of tons)	Value (billions of dollars)
Truck	204.7	\$188.7
Rail	14.9	\$1
Pipeline	6.3	\$1.8
Air	0.3	\$26.5

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis and County Data, Transportation 2015. 2. CONNECTING THE ECONOMY — 9

Small Area Forecast

To understand how demands on the transportation system will change between now and 2050, DRCOG must forecast how growth and development will affect the distribution of system users, households and jobs throughout the region. DRCOG staff uses the small-area forecast to accomplish this. The most recent forecast was completed in 2020 and included a significant stakeholder engagement effort to inform the forecast.

To easily obtain input of stakeholders at DRCOG's member governments, the GIS team developed an interactive comment map. The purpose of the map was to provide an opportunity for planning staff at local jurisdictions to provide feedback on anticipated household and job growth from 2020 to 2050 throughout the region, as reported at the Transportation Analysis Zone level, for which there are 2,800 geographic areas.

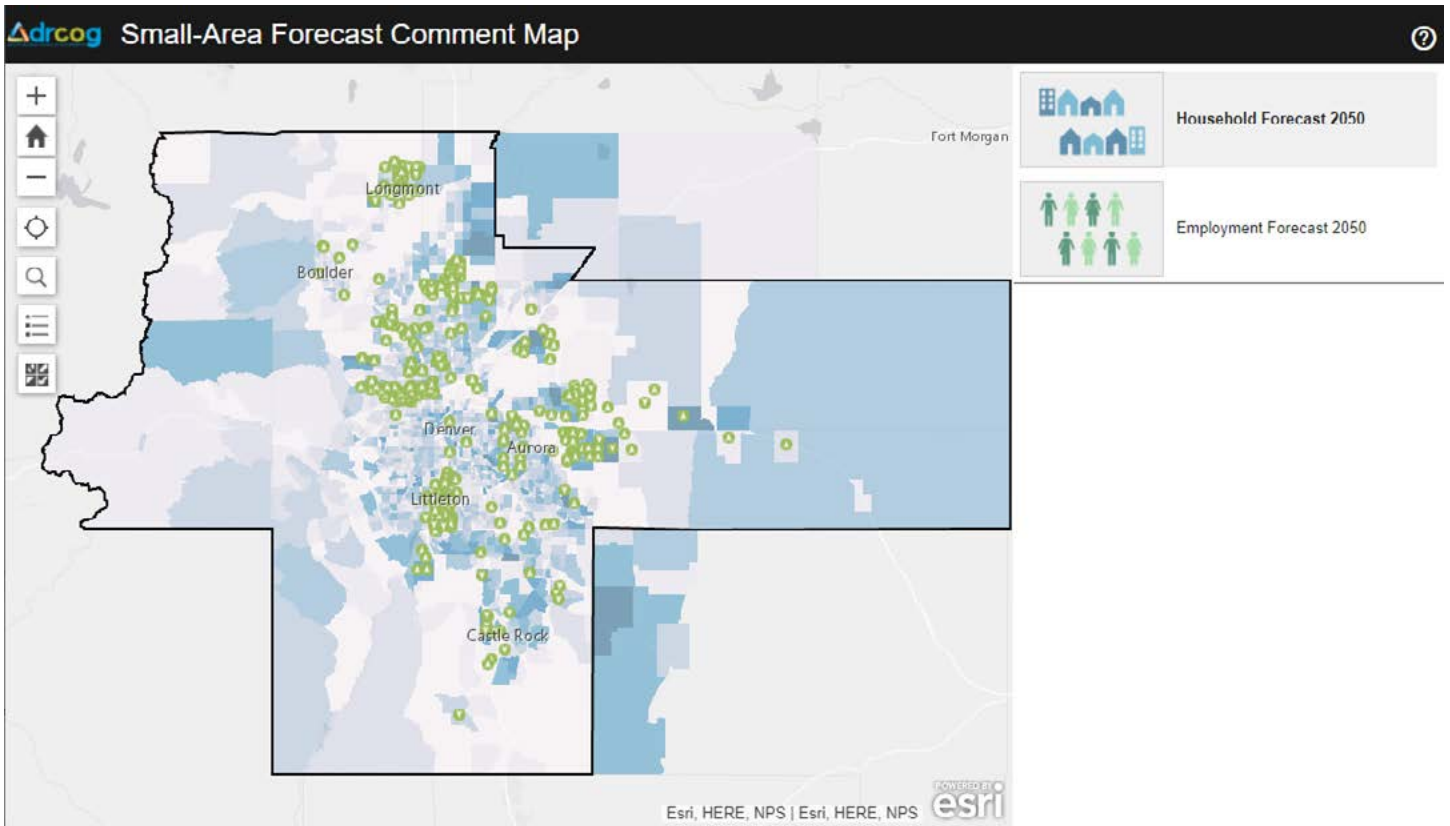
At the Transportation Analysis Zone level, the comment map displayed household and employment estimates for 2020 and forecast totals for 2050, as well as the Transportation Analysis Zone number for reference purposes. There were two separate yet similar maps; one for households and one for employment. The comment map was open for about a month, which staff promoted through an eblast to 138 local government stakeholders.

DRCOG planning staff offered a short webinar at the beginning of the comment period to present the map and solicit feedback from jurisdictional planning staff from across the region. DRCOG staff also met individually with planners from several local governments to provide additional assistance and obtain additional feedback.

DRCOG staff received 323 comments on the household forecast map and 264 comments on the employment forecast map, for a total of 587 comments. Comments were received from 29 jurisdictions.

DRCOG staff responded to and addressed all 587 comments. The response to comments included making changes to the land use model to reflect a request for increased — or decreased — capacity for households or employment in a given Transportation Analysis Zone, or set of zones. Additionally, staff response to comments included making changes to the small-area forecast to reflect local jurisdictional staffs' knowledge of near-term development in their communities.

To follow up, staff sent a thank you email to each of the 29 jurisdictions that provided feedback on the small-area forecast comment map. The emails summarized the actions taken by Regional Planning and Development staff in response to the comments provided by jurisdiction planning staff with the goal of ultimately improving the small-area forecast for households and employment estimates.



Certification Review Outreach

The Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration must jointly certify the metropolitan transportation planning processes carried out in transportation management areas at least every four years. Part of this certification review process included public outreach in 2020. DRCOG staff assisted the federal agencies in promoting a survey to solicit feedback in May and June. The public was also invited to comment at the DRCOG Transportation Advisory Committee meeting held on May 18 and the federal agencies distributed a flyer announcing the opportunity as well.

DRCOG helped promote the survey. Staff sent eblasts to more than 1,600 recipients on May 28 and June 8 and

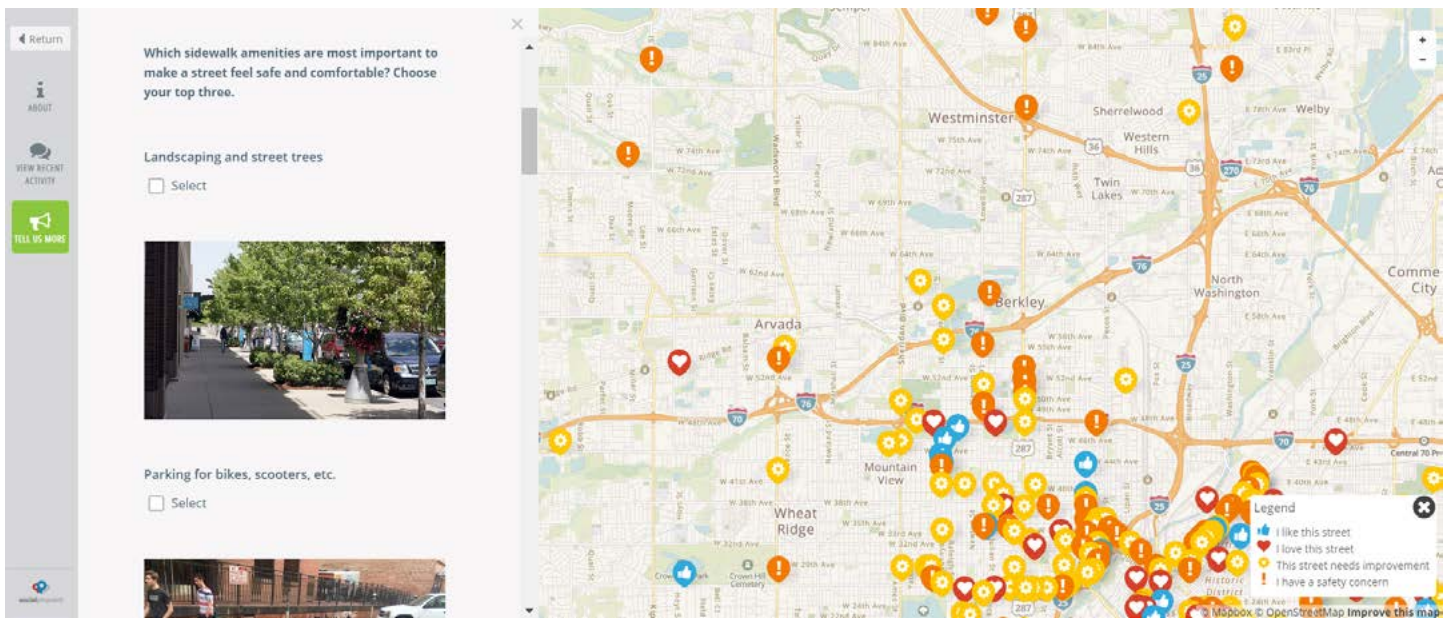
four social media posts announced the opportunity with 3,600 impressions with an engagement rate of 2.6%. The agencies received 108 responses to the online survey.

Although the purpose of the survey was to inform the certification review process, the results also provided useful input for this annual report as several of the questions related to public engagement processes.

The federal certification review noted that “[t]he results indicate that most respondents generally support the outreach work DRCOG is doing, especially as being a convener of multiple stakeholders and facilitating complex discussions. Responders recognized DRCOG’s extensive public and committee outreach efforts, among other attributes including the helpfulness of staff in various capacities. Opportunities for improvement exist, though limited. Areas that stand out include: attempting to better demonstrate how feedback is considered when making transportation planning decisions and working on obtaining feedback from non-transportation savvy parties.”

Regional Complete Streets Toolkit

DRCOG began development of the Regional Complete Streets Toolkit in 2020. Staff created an interactive map and questionnaire for the public to provide guidance during the early stages of the toolkit development. The primary objective of the engagement effort was to assess which design features make people feel safe and comfortable, and what features are most important to making a Complete Street. The purpose of the map was to identify examples of Complete Streets, as well as those streets that need improvement or are unsafe.



The interactive map was available from Sept. 17 through Nov. 10. DRCOG staff promoted the opportunity to provide input in Bike to Wherever Week communications that reached more than 47,000 mailing list subscribers on Sept. 17. Additionally, DRCOG sent eblast notifications about the opportunity to approximately 2,000 people on other DRCOG mailing lists on Sept. 21 and Oct. 28. In addition, DRCOG promoted the opportunity in five social media posts in both Spanish and English. These posts received over 4,300 impressions with an average engagement rate of 3.14%.

In total, DRCOG received 725 comments on the interactive map and 375 questionnaire responses. These came from 571 unique stakeholders. The site received 2,074 total visits. For additional details, a summary of the input received is available in the [Regional Complete Streets Toolkit Engagement Summary](#).

In 2020, DRCOG staff also convened a Regional Complete Streets Steering Committee made up of local government

stakeholders to help develop of the plan. The toolkit is anticipated to be finalized in summer 2021.

Citizens' Academy

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the spring academy was postponed until fall, and then the fall academy was held virtually over Zoom. The virtual academy had about 30 participants who learned from local experts about regional issues like transportation, affordable housing, public health, civic engagement and demographics. Each participant worked on an individual action plan to further their involvement in civic life after the academy. The academy is similar to a leadership training program, but focuses on the participants' engagement in their communities rather than business development. The academy continues to receive high marks from attendees and DRCOG staff will conduct another virtual academy in spring 2021. Ideally, staff will facilitate a return to in-person academies beginning with the fall 2021 session.

Evaluation

One of the guiding principles detailed in DRCOG's public engagement plan is the regular review of its public engagement processes. Using the objectives and evaluation criteria from the public engagement plan, DRCOG staff have analyzed and reflected upon areas of success and improvement for DRCOG's engagement work in 2020.

Objective: Provide Meaningful Opportunities to Participate

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- » *Did you provide information to community organizations representing and invite the participation of their members?*
- » *Did you invite people to share their perspectives before each decision-making milestone?*
- » *Did you share input from people directly with decision-makers?*
- » *Did you give people opportunities to shape alternatives?*
- » *How many people accessed or downloaded project information from DRCOG's website?*
- » *How many people unsubscribed from electronic communications about the project?*
- » *How many people opted-in to your project's interest list?*
- » *From eblasts and social media, how many people clicked through to information on DRCOG's website about your project?*
- » *Compared to the number sent, how many recipients opened emails or surveys about your project?*
- » *How many replies, mentions or comments did information about the project garner on social media?*
- » *How many people attended in-person opportunities (such as public hearings or open houses) to provide their perspectives?*

- » *Did you hold in-person opportunities to participate at accessible locations? How did you define accessibility?*
- » *Did you hold in-person opportunities to participate at various times? How did you determine what those times would be?*
- » *How did you supplement in-person opportunities to participate with online opportunities to participate?*
- » *How many comments did you receive on the project?*
- » *Did the comments you receive represent a diversity of perspective?*
- » *What demographic groups did people participating and providing comment represent?*
- » *Did people indicate a willingness to provide their perspectives in the future?*
- » *How did you modify or change the project based on public input?*

REFLECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Determining how to provide meaningful opportunities for the public presented new challenges in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Only a few meetings took place in person prior to the start of the pandemic, such as the January and February Board of Directors meeting, committee meetings and Regional Transportation Plan advisory group meetings. Beginning in early March, all public engagement activities were limited to the virtual environment for the remainder of the year.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, staff developed many virtual opportunities for the public to share their perspectives on DRCOG's work and shape alternatives throughout the year. As described earlier, online engagement sites were built to support engagement for Taking Action on Regional Vision Zero, the Regional Multimodal Freight Plan, Regional Complete Streets Toolkit and the 2050 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan.

The engagement sites provided opportunities for the public to review and comment on draft plans (Regional Vision Zero and Multimodal Freight Plan), provide input to shape a new project (Complete Streets), and to share perspectives and shape alternatives at decision-making milestones (2050 RTP). The engagement sites received a total of over 6,400 visits in 2020. Several people opted-in to DRCOG's public hearing interest list through the online engagement sites. The number of comments received on each project are noted in the descriptions above.

Social media and eblasts were primary drivers to the online engagement sites and the DRCOG website. Social media alone drove more than 10,000 clicks through to either a page at drcog.org or one of the online engagement sites. Eblasts had about an average of 25% click-through rate to these sites. The average of the engagement eblast open rates was slightly lower in 2020, at 25% compared with 35% in 2019. However, based on recommendations from the 2019 engagement report, staff sent out more reminder eblasts for opportunities to comment, and those tended to receive significantly lower open rates than the first eblast sent about an input opportunity, reducing the average.

Although click-through rates exceed industry standards for eblasts from governments and nonprofits, opportunities remain to increase click-through rates by reviewing mailing lists and creating more targeted lists by adding more community organizations that work with underrepresented populations. The more targeted eblasts tend to result in higher click-through and open rates. It is critical that DRCOG hear from a wide range of demographic groups that represent the diversity of the Denver region. Although less than 1% of people unsubscribe from eblasts, DRCOG staff recommends continuing to create compelling content to encourage greater interest and participation.

Social media was effective at promoting DRCOG's projects and creating opportunities for resident participation, particularly in 2020's nearly all-virtual environment. Social media engagement rates (when a user clicks on, reacts to, comments on or shares a post) averaged 3.58% or 77 engagements per post. DRCOG staff used paid social media advertising for the 2050 RTP budget activity and survey, which received tens of thousands of impressions. Some of the most successful organic posts were those that embedded video content with icons and those that highlighted photos of recognizable regional landmarks. Custom graphics also performed well, therefore staff believes them to be worth the design time and effort. In analyzing the number of surveys completed and how they coincided with the timing of social media posts, staff concluded that social media drove significant traffic to the site, but may not have resulted in significant numbers of surveys completed or comments received. Staff believes additional analysis of social metrics is warranted to determine how to ensure that click-throughs also result in visitors providing input on the site.

Spanish-language social media ads do not reach as many users, but engagement on Spanish posts is consistently higher than posts in English. To build a larger following among Spanish-speaking residents, staff recommends developing a general Spanish-language social media campaign or integrate more Spanish posts into DRCOG's evergreen and campaign marketing.

All projects that received public comments in 2020 incorporated a comment matrix for the Board of Directors and committees to review prior to adoption. Although recommended for improvement in the 2019 annual report, DRCOG staff continue to place limited emphasis on the comments that have been received and staff responses

in their staff presentations to the Board. This remains a significant opportunity for improvement, and in particular something that DRCOG staff need to work on, outside of engagement staff.

Although the online engagement efforts were successful at obtaining many visits, views and comments, DRCOG staff lacks the demographic information necessary to understand how representative virtual commenters are of the residents of the region. Continuing with virtual engagement efforts through 2021 and beyond the pandemic, DRCOG engagement staff considers it is imperative that the organization develop a strategy to ensure its online tools reach residents representative of the diversity of experiences and backgrounds in the region.

Objective: Involve Under-Represented Communities

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- » *Did participation include youth, people with disabilities, people from low-income communities, people from communities of color, or people who speak languages other than English?*
- » *Did you conduct a demographic analysis of people affected by the project to identify race, language proficiency, income and other factors?*
- » *Did you facilitate translation of materials or meeting presentations into languages other than English?*
- » *Did you make project information available at community locations such as health care clinics, local markets, markets serving speakers of languages other than English, community centers and schools?*
- » *How many comments did you receive in languages other than English?*
- » *Did meeting materials include an Americans with Disabilities Act notice?*

- » *Did you receive requests for materials to be provided in alternative formats, such as Braille? If so, did you accommodate such requests?*
- » *Were opportunities for public participation held in venues that are accessible and barrier free?*

REFLECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

As noted in the previous section, an opportunity for improvement is for DRCOG to develop ways to ensure that youth, people with disabilities, people from communities of color and people who speak languages other than English have participated in its engagement efforts. In order to better assess gaps in reaching under-represented communities, staff recommends collecting more demographic data from those participating in DRCOG's engagement activities. In addition, greater web analytics and tracking could assist in providing some of these details.

In 2019, DRCOG staff found that attending existing community events was successful in reaching a more diverse population — however, due to the pandemic, nearly all community events were canceled in 2020. As the pandemic comes to an end and events begin to take place again, attending events should remain a high priority of the engagement staff to ensure diverse participation. In addition, staff should continue to develop and cultivate relationships with community-based organizations and underrepresented groups.

In 2020, the majority of public engagement efforts were conducted virtually. The online engagement site used to collect feedback on several projects allows for auto-translation into any language. In addition, DRCOG staff translated materials and videos for the 2050 RTP scenario process into Spanish. Many of the materials for the census

project were translated into Spanish, as hard-to-reach populations such as Spanish-speakers were a significant component of the grant-funded project.

DRCOG staff translated several organic and paid social media posts into Spanish. While the paid Spanish posts had higher engagement rates, staff is unable to track how many people are using the translation function on the online engagement site. No written comments were received on any projects in languages other than English, but there is a potential that some of the surveys were responded to in a different language that cannot be tracked. Again, opportunities may exist to integrate better web tracking that can tell us who is engaging with DRCOG's engagement site in a translated language. Staff recommends developing relationships with people who speak languages other than English in part by using paid social media advertising.

The Civic Advisory Group and Youth Advisory Panel were created for the 2050 RTP process to help address disparities in engagement among groups and had many successful meetings in 2020. Staff recommends continued analysis and reflection of how to better reach people of various demographics.

With the exception of January and February, all of DRCOG's public meetings were held virtually. Meeting locations and times were posted on the DRCOG website, as well as in agendas and with instructions for virtual participation. The virtual platforms used (primarily GoToWebinar or GoToMeeting) were accessible either by computer or telephone to limit barriers to participation that would require access to a computer.

Objective: Communicate Complete, Accurate, Understandable and Timely Information

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- » *Did federal regulations guide public engagement? How did you comply with all federal regulations?*
- » *Before distributing to people, did you test information, materials or surveys for clarity among people not involved in the project?*
- » *Did you review (or invite review of) information for accuracy?*
- » *Was any information deemed a vital document? If so, did you translate it into other languages as guided by DRCOG's Limited English Proficiency plan?*
- » *Did you make people aware of the availability of information through email, web or partner networks?*
- » *Are you clearly advertising meetings, workshops, surveys and other opportunities to participate on DRCOG's website.*
- » *Did you provide at least two weeks' notice of meetings, workshops and other opportunities to participate?*
- » *How far in advance did you provide notice?*
- » *Did you invite community organizations to share opportunities to participate with their members?*
- » *Did people indicate they believed their involvement was considered or influenced the project?*
- » *Did you email information about meetings, workshops, surveys and other opportunities to participate to relevant DRCOG lists?*
- » *Did work with Communications and Marketing to provide information and notice of opportunities to participate via social media?*
- » *What type of media coverage did the engagement process associated with your project receive?*

» *Did you make information about pending decisions available to the public at least one week in advance of any decision-making milestones?*

REFLECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Overall, DRCOG's public engagement efforts met the evaluation criteria for 2020. Staff complied with the minimum federal requirements for public engagement with adequate public notice, public comment periods and public hearings, as noted above in the project descriptions. Opportunities to participate were advertised clearly on DRCOG's website and online engagement sites, and through email communications. All public hearings were properly noticed and invitations to workshops and opportunities to participate were sent out in sufficient time. Information about pending decisions were made available to the public more than a week before decision-making milestones. DRCOG staff translated videos and materials for the 2050 RTP engagement efforts into Spanish, and published several social media posts in Spanish. Staff raised awareness of DRCOG projects and opportunities for input at virtual meetings, workshops and online through DRCOG's website, emails to partner networks and social media. A total of 28 eblasts were sent throughout the year to DRCOG mailing lists regarding the major projects described in this summary. A few of the projects, such as the Taking Action on Regional Vision Zero plan, received media coverage.

An opportunity for improvement is for staff to better test information, materials and surveys for clarity prior to releasing them to the general public, particularly with so many materials being shared only virtually in 2020. DRCOG's advisory groups for the 2050 RTP assisted in providing some feedback on the online engagement site, but more of this testing would be useful in the future.

In addition, staff recommends that a more consistent process for project evaluation be undertaken in 2021. Project evaluations were not completed for the Regional Vision Zero or Regional Multimodal Freight plans that were adopted in 2020. Engagement staff recommends that they work with project managers to conduct thorough evaluations of criteria on a project-by-project basis shortly after wrap-up. Staff also recommends that DRCOG develop a method for surveying participants to evaluate their perceived involvement in and influence of DRCOG projects in 2021, particularly as the 2050 RTP process is completed. Such project-based evaluations will help to better inform future projects and annual engagement reports.

