



MPO Report:

Public Involvement Trends That Matter

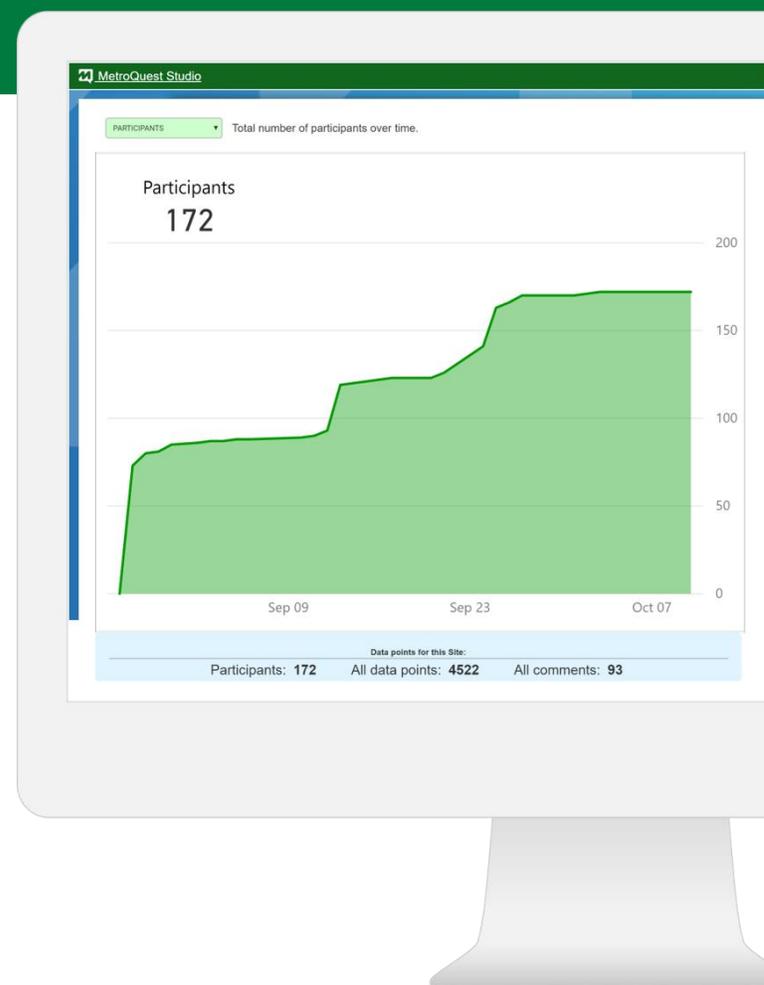
Introduction

Today's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are involving the public in transportation planning in new ways. What should your MPO be doing? Explore the latest trends and best practices for answers.

While MPOs are mandated to provide a way for the public to participate in the planning process, their outreach efforts currently far outpace basic regulatory requirements.

In parallel with the 2018 AMPO Annual Conference, MetroQuest surveyed planners and public involvement professionals to uncover just how today's MPOs are approaching engagement. Over 170 participants described their current challenges, priorities, and practices.

Let's dive into the survey results ...





Despite their efforts, many MPOs are suffering from poor public participation.

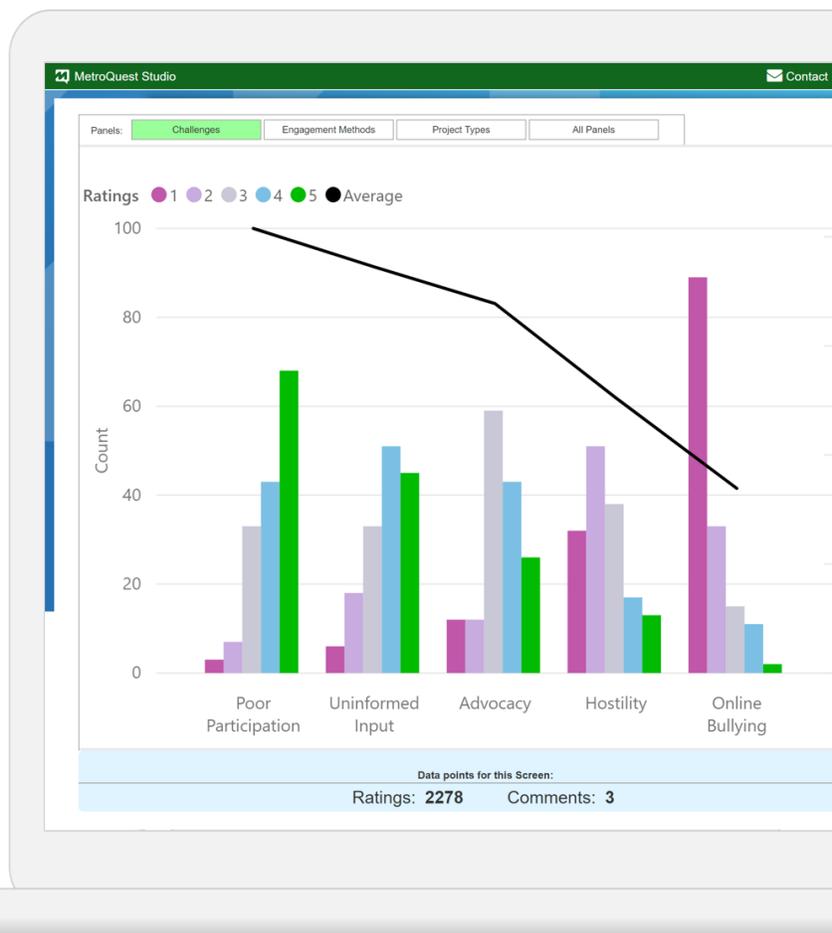
Public involvement is valuable for many reasons. Informed public input can help shape transportation plans to meet the true needs of residents. Better decisions can be made prior to investing millions of dollars in new developments, while increased public support can streamline project approvals. But effective public involvement is not always easy.

We asked MPOs about their public involvement challenges, using both a rating and open-ended question. They rated 'poor participation' as the most common challenge, followed closely by 'uninformed input'. "People just don't make time to give their input," noted one respondent, while another warned, "uninformed citizens are trying to sway projects."

Even with adequate participation, one MPO remains concerned that "reaching the same motivated people may not be representative." If your MPO is struggling with these challenges, you are not alone.

Top 3 Challenges

1. Poor participation (rated 4.1 out of 5)
2. Uninformed input (3.7 out of 5)
3. Advocacy (3.4 out of 5)





Increasing participation is the top public involvement priority for today's MPOs.

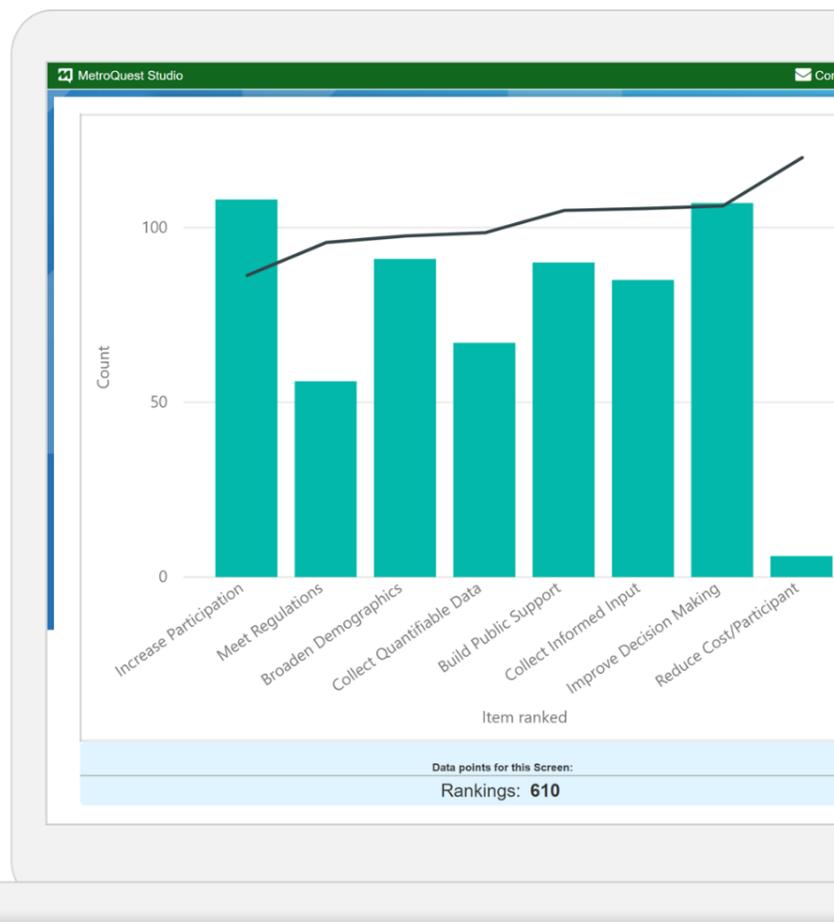
We asked MPOs what their top priorities are when it comes to public involvement. With MPOs reporting that their public is apathetic or don't have time to participate, it's no wonder that their number one priority is to increase participation (as rated by 69% of respondents).

Because today's MPOs are struggling to reach critical mass when it comes to engaging residents, they are looking to boost participation, to broaden demographic reach, and to collect educated input. Achieving these goals also enables MPOs to reach their other top public involvement priorities: improved decision making and building public support.

One participant stressed the importance of "building trust and getting people to show up," particularly in the context of the "rise in fake news and alternative facts."

Top 5 Priorities

1. Increase participation (69.2%)
2. Improve decision making (68.6%)
3. Broaden demographics (58.3%)
4. Build public support (57.7%)
5. Collect informed input (54.5%)





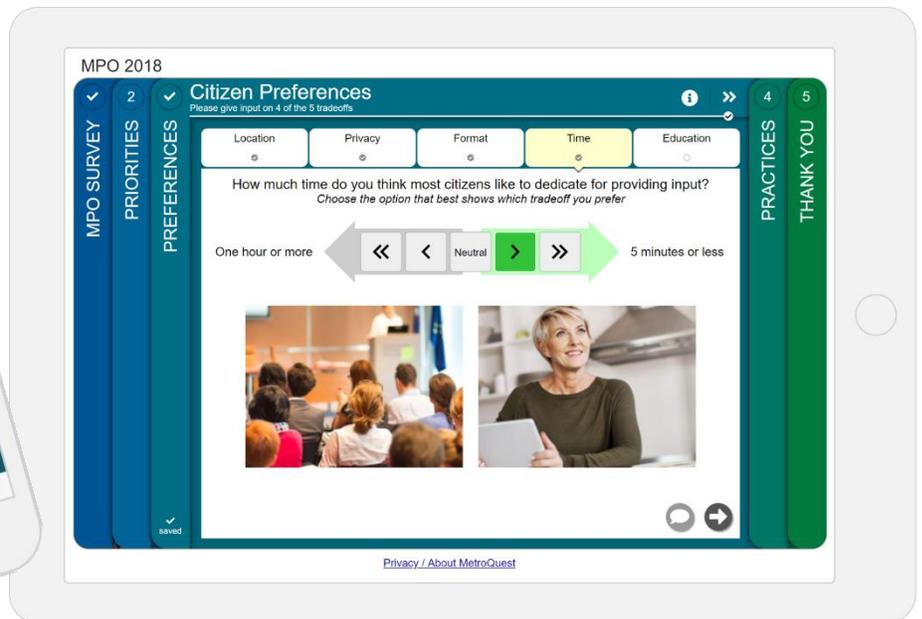
People prefer public involvement to be convenient, fast, informative, and private.

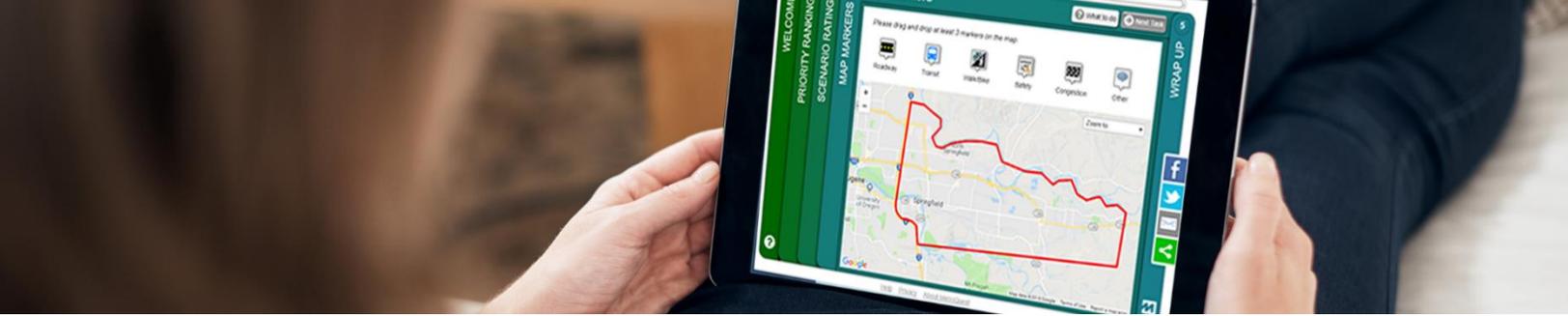
The best way to increase participation is to invite the public to get involved on their terms. In this survey, we asked MPOs to describe citizen preferences for public involvement.

MPOs reported that people prefer to provide feedback online (rather than going to specific locations), privately (rather than in a public forum), and using a visually interactive tool that weaves in education and takes 5 minutes or less of their time.

Citizen prefer to participate:

- ✓ Online from anywhere (92.3% vs 7.7% at a specific location)
- ✓ Privately in surveys or polls (78.4% vs 21.6% publicly in online forums or meetings)
- ✓ Using visually interactive surveys (93.5% vs 6.5% with multiple choice questions)
- ✓ In 5 minutes or less (92.3% vs 7.7% taking an hour or more)
- ✓ With education weaved in the survey (90.1% vs 9.9% preferring to read documents)



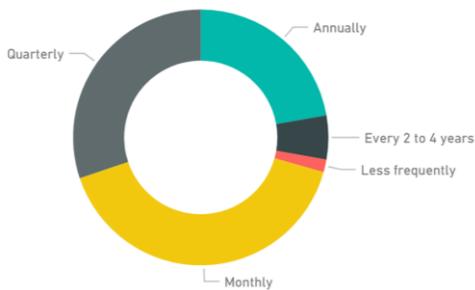


MPOs are going beyond public meetings, using social media and online tools.

Are MPOs using the most effective means to reach the public? We asked about current practices and learned that MPOs are using both traditional and modern methods.

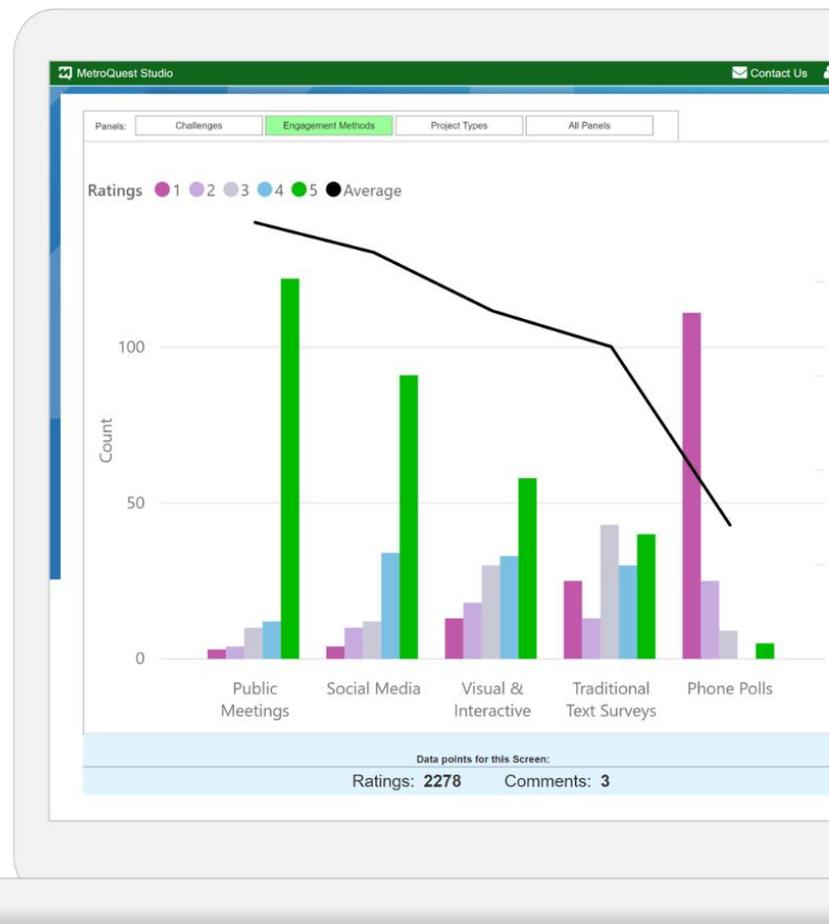
Public meetings are still the most popular method for reaching communities, since often they are mandated. Yet, public meetings can be highly costly and can suffer from poor attendance or disruption from emotionally motivated participants. This is perhaps why today's MPOs are also turning to more modern online options. Most MPOs reported using social media for outreach as well as visually interactive online tools for public participation.

At what frequency are today's MPOs engaging the public? The majority of MPOs reported involving the public monthly (40.5%) or quarterly (30.2%):



Top 3 Methods

1. Public meetings (rated 4.6 out of 5)
2. Social media (4.3 out of 5)
3. Visual, interactive tools (3.7 out of 5)





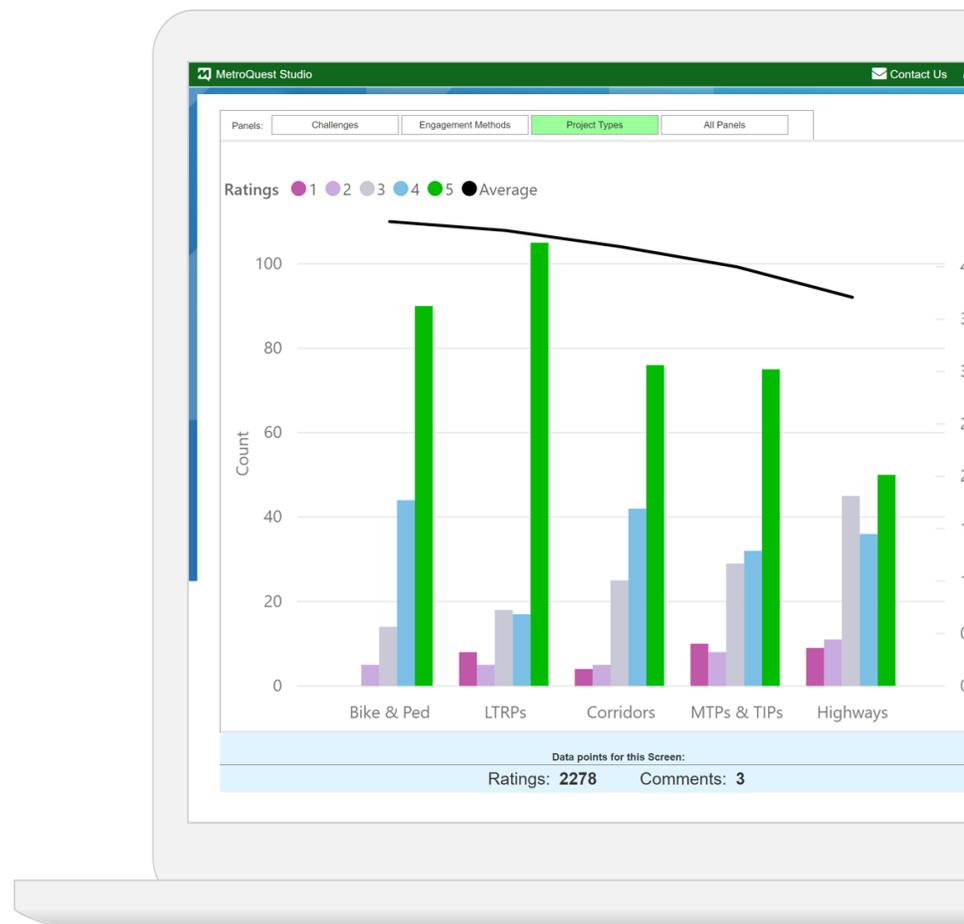
MPOs are involving the public on a variety of planning projects.

MPOs are responsible for a wide variety of transportation plans, with projects that range in scope from bike and pedestrian initiatives to highway developments. But for what types of projects do they seek public involvement? The short answer: all of them.

Looking into the survey results in more detail, we learned that MPOs are most likely to involve the public in bike and pedestrian planning, then long range transportation plans, followed by corridor studies. They also engage residents in Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTPs) and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs), as well for highway planning projects.

Top 4 Project Types

1. Bike & Ped (4.4 out of 5)
2. LTRPs (rated 4.3 out of 5)
3. Corridors (4.2 out of 5)
4. MTPs & TIPs (4.0 out of 5)



Conclusions

Today's MPOs are expending great effort to involve the public. Either monthly or quarterly, they are engaging residents for input on a variety of transportation planning projects, from bike and pedestrian studies to long range transportation plans.

Yet, their success in engaging people varies. While traditional public meetings remain most popular, MPOs are also turning to more modern methods to overcome common public involvement challenges.

One respondent described her challenge with public meetings, "We usually have trouble getting a diverse amount of participation. Regardless of what advertisement methods we try, we normally get the same small crowd during our public input periods." In fact, most MPOs reported 'poor participation' as their top issue. "Currently we have very little public visibility, awareness, and involvement," explained another survey respondent.

Boosting participation is at the top of the priority list for most MPOs. They are looking to broaden demographic reach and collect informed input to improve decision making and build public support. Recognizing that people prefer public involvement to be convenient, fast, informative, and private, many MPOs are going online, turning to social media and visually interactive surveys to take their public involvement success to the next level.

We hope you found these trends informative and wish you outstanding engagement success!



Discover how Hillsborough MPO, Pasco County MPO, and AECOM collaborated to engage over 12,000 residents on three transportation projects by watching this on-demand webinar today!

[WATCH WEBINAR →](#)

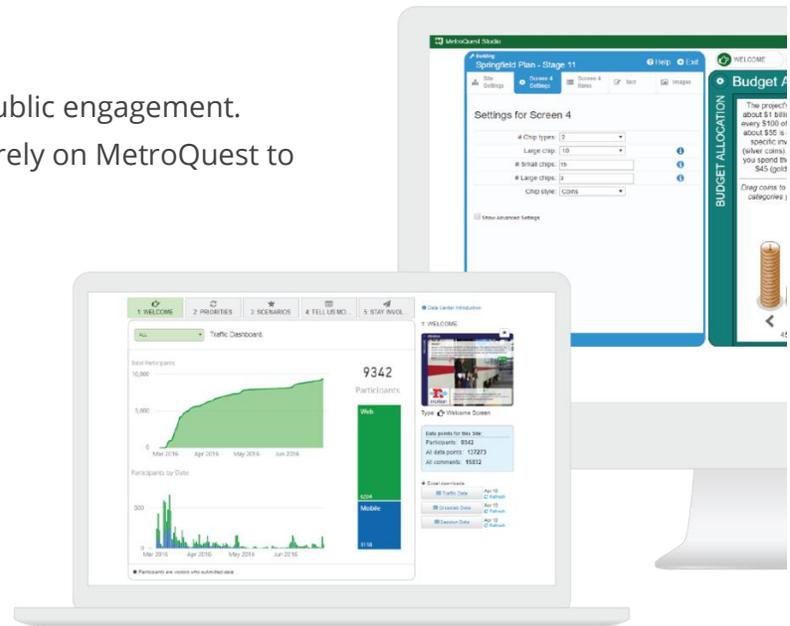
ABOUT METROQUEST

MetroQuest is the leading solution for online public engagement. Planners and public participation practitioners rely on MetroQuest to optimize citizen participation for all their outreach and planning projects.

Maximize Participation – Tired of input from the same narrow group of people? With MetroQuest, it's common to engage 2,000 to 10,000+ participants across a broad demographic including hard to reach and traditionally underrepresented audiences.

Collect Informed Input – MetroQuest is optimized to educate the public and collect informed input quickly. Participants can see the impact of their choices in real time and learn about the alternatives and tradeoffs based on their own priorities.

Deliver Actionable Results – MetroQuest is optimized to give decision makers the confidence they need to make critical choices. That means both quantity and quality – engaging thousands of people from a broad demographic and collecting quantifiable and trustworthy input to support decisions.



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