

Virtual Public Involvement

Virtual public involvement supports agencies' efforts to engage the public more effectively by supplementing face-to-face information sharing with technology.



Innovative virtual public involvement techniques provide State departments of transportation (DOTs), transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and rural transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) with a platform to inform the public and receive feedback. These strategies increase the number and variety of channels available to agencies for remotely disseminating information to the public and create efficiencies in how input is collected and considered, which can potentially accelerate planning and project development processes.

ENCOURAGING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public involvement is a critical component in the transportation decision-making process, allowing for meaningful consideration and input from interested individuals. As daily users of the transportation system, the public has useful opinions, insights, and observations to share with their State DOT and local agencies on the performance and needs of the transportation system or on specific projects. Early and strong public engagement has the potential to accelerate project delivery by helping identify and address public concerns early in the planning process, thereby reducing delays from previously unknown interests late in the project delivery process.

Nearly all State DOTs and most local agencies use websites to post information about their activities. With the increased use of social media tools and mobile applications, the public can access user-friendly features such as online videos, podcasts, crowdsourced maps, and other interactive forums to receive information and provide input.

These new opportunities for information sharing and public involvement in the transportation planning, programming, and project development process include, but are not limited to, telephone town halls, online meetings, pop-up outreach, social meetings/meeting-in-a box kits, story maps, quick videos, crowdsourcing, survey tools, real-time polling tools, social media following, visualization, and working with bloggers.

BENEFITS

- ▶ **Efficiency and Low Cost.** Virtual tools and platforms can be made accessible to communities efficiently, many at a lower cost than traditional public engagement methods.



Visualization of a proposed roadway realignment showing visual and construction impacts.

Source: FHWA; Imagery: U.S. Geological Survey

- ▶ **Accelerated Project Delivery.** Robust public engagement helps identify issues early in the project planning process, which reduces the need to revisit decisions.
- ▶ **Communication and Collaboration.** Virtual public involvement can aid in establishing a common vision for transportation and ensure the opinions and needs of the public are understood and considered during transportation planning and project development.
- ▶ **Expanded Engagement.** Virtual tools include stakeholders who do not participate in traditional approaches to public involvement. Greater engagement can improve project quality.

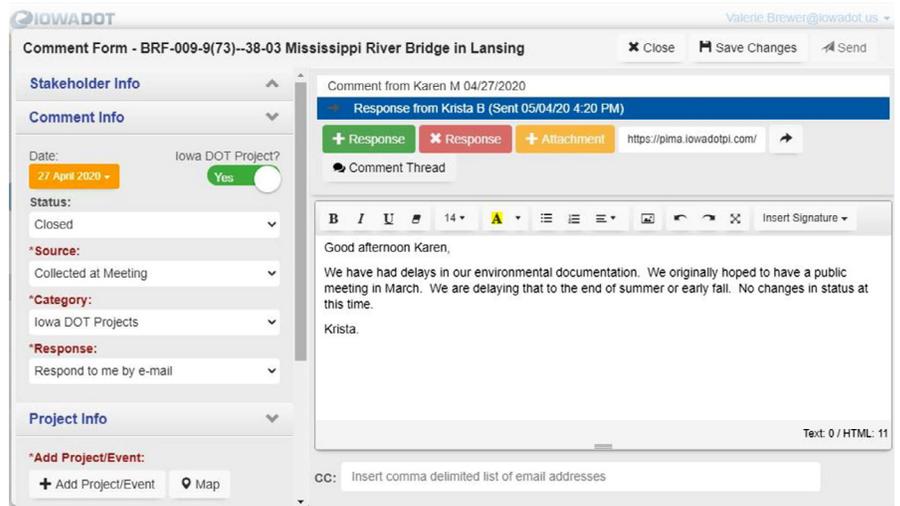


Design visualization. Source: North Carolina DOT

STATE OF THE PRACTICE

Virtual public involvement is providing State DOTs and local agencies throughout the country with a platform of innovative tools and strategies for making public involvement more accessible, thus providing a better understanding of the public's concerns regarding transportation system performance and needs. The following are a few of many examples of successful techniques:

- ▶ Iowa DOT developed a web-based Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA) tool that documents and tracks public comment throughout all phases of project delivery.
- ▶ North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority is using targeted online advertisements to reach intended audiences strategically.
- ▶ The Broward MPO in Florida employs a robust social media strategy to engage and inform its stakeholders through eye-catching visualizations and social media campaigns.



Responding to a public comment within the Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA) Source: Iowa DOT

RESOURCES

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