Chapter 8: Summary, Results & Recommendations

The strategies outlined in the MPO’s Public Participation Plan provide for timely public notice, complete access to information, and support early and continuing involvement of the community. The record shows that the MPO accomplished these objectives during this two-year evaluation period.

Notable Successes in Public Engagement

Beginning in May of 2015, staff began researching and reviewing literature on the relationship between the built environment and health. The research included a survey of health impact assessments, healthy planning policies, health in comprehensive planning, and strategies for building healthy places. Staff has also worked with the Hillsborough County Health Department to provide presentations to the Planning Commission and Tampa City Council on Health in All Policies (HiAP) as a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision making across sectors and policy areas. See George Road Complete Streets Study Chapter 6.

Other noteworthy new collaborations are noted as follows:

- A new member of our board: the School District of Hillsborough County, which has led to the development of an ad hoc working group on schools and transportation to begin in 2016
- A new graduate fellowship with the USF Urban & Regional Planning Program. The MPO created two fellowships to support interns from the University of South Florida’s Urban and Regional Planning Program for the 2015-16 school year. Familiarizing emerging planners with community priorities encourages talented students to remain in Hillsborough County after graduation. The Agency gets the benefit of their knowledge, skills and possible future employment.

Expanding the MPO’s Following

The MPO adopted the Imagine 2040 Transportation Plan on November 12, 2014 and in 2015 the plan won several state and regional awards. With nearly 6,000 participants, Imagine 2040’s outreach program had the greatest amount of public participation ever achieved by the Hillsborough MPO and Planning Commission.
The MPO continues its effort to expand the use of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to advertise events, share information and promote participation in transportation planning. As a result, the number of MPO “followers” has reached close to 5,000, and the MPO continues as the largest Twitter followers for any MPO. As of December 2015, the email database increased 20% to about 6,260 email addresses.

Thanks to all of our eNews subscribers, we again received the 2014 and 2015 All Star Award from Constant Contact ©, Inc. Only the top 10% of Constant Contact’s half a million worldwide businesses and nonprofits are recognized for how successful they are at engaging their customers. Consistently high open rates, click through rates, and low bounce rates were among the qualifications.

Making it Easier to Participate
The MPO moved two public meetings to a 6PM start time to give more citizens an opportunity to participant in the Tampa Bay Express discussions. The MPO continued to use technology to assist with effective outreach. The MPO introduced a Facebook “event” page to solicit public comments for one week before MPO Board meetings and adding a live-call-in (GoToMeeting) at our annual public hearing on investment priorities. By doing so the MPO is encouraging more public participation and makes it easier for people who have other time constraints to voice their opinion. The public comments are then included with all email correspondence provided to MPO members and summarized during Public Comments at the Board Meetings.

The MetroQuest survey, on an online, layperson-friendly interactive platform designed by the vendor MetroQuest enabled participation from anywhere and was used in Imagine 2040 - Part 2. Computers and IPads were used to encourage citizens to electronically complete the surveys on location. Other tools used were the TIP
website mapping tool, Mindmixer website for Columbus Drive study. A new technology called Poll Everywhere which uses texts from cellphones and input from web-enabled smartphones to capture feedback from audiences. It was embedded in a PowerPoint to capture the real time responses.

The MPO changed it's document standards to make them easier to read. All materials use Arial font style.

New Committees Meeting Room

Having outgrown the MPO Boardroom, work began to structurally modify the offices to accommodate more public meetings. A new meeting room was designed to provide more convenience to the attendees. The structural work was funded and started in 2015, with completion anticipated in early 2016. The new meeting room is approximately 850 square feet with special features to enhance the audio/visual quality experience during meetings. The budget for the new features were:

- $2,500 for projectors,
- $1,500 for speakers/amplifiers,
- $2,300 for wireless microphones
  and
- $15,250 for new furniture.

Previously, the MPO was using the training room on the 15th floor for their committee meetings which only had access behind security doors. The new room will have improved access to public restrooms.

New Planning Commission/MPO Library
Although visits to the library are not measured any longer it is notable that during 2015 the Planning Commission library was relocated, enhanced and enlarged. The library devoted to plans, studies and documents pertaining to growth and development in Hillsborough County and is a partner with the Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative, and its holdings are included in the Cooperative’s catalogue.

**Letting the Public Have Its Say**

The public continued to have its say on MPO plans and indeed was involved at the inception and throughout their development. Specific issues related to the MPO’s mission or plans became newsworthy and attracted a high degree of public attention and input.

Notable examples include:

While the MPO has had a proactive public participation program for years, in 2015 we raised the bar, **we moved the TIP public hearing to evening, adding a live-call-in (GoToMeeting)** at our annual public hearing on investment priorities, and **expanded social media usage with a Facebook “event” with a week-long public comment period** prior to board meetings. The evening event attracted approximately 360 participants in addition to the 65 who were "virtual" attendees.

The MPO adopted the Imagine 2040 Transportation Plan on November 12, 2014 and in 2015 **the plan won four state and regional awards**. With nearly 6,000 participants, Imagine 2040’s outreach program had the **greatest amount of public participation ever achieved** by the Hillsborough MPO and Planning Commission.

During Imagine 2040 the MPO **sent the largest mailing ever of counter cards to**
every property and business owner in Hillsborough County to encourage them to take the online MetroQuest survey for Imagine 2040. The online MetroQuest interactive survey generated 5,261 visits, of which 2,217 surveys were submitted with data, for a response rate of 42%.

On March 27, 2015, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council held its 23rd Annual Future of the Region Awards program, and Imagine 2040 was pleased to receive first Place in the Public Education category and also to receive the One Bay Award.

In September 2015, Imagine 2040 received the Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association’s 2015 Project Award of Merit in the Best Practices category. Imagine 2040 also received an Exemplary Implementation Award from Open Planning Tools Group (OPTG) in Baltimore, Maryland, which recognizes projects that utilize planning tools in an innovative manner to create effective public engagement.

**Recommendations to Enhance the Public Participation Program**

Based on this review, the MPO’s Public Participation Plan has worked effectively over the last two years. In keeping with the MPO’s objectives of continuous improvement and making the best use of limited resources, the following refinements are recommended.

1. **Seek feedback that is immediate and project specific**, by asking questions such as “was this informative and helpful to you?” at the conclusion of every survey or public meeting sponsored by the MPO. This would be in lieu of conducting periodic polls on the effectiveness public engagement. *(Continued from 2010/2010 and 2012/2013 Measures of Effectiveness Reports.)*

2. **Increase public participation efforts with minorities, low-income individuals, and the transportation disadvantaged.** The FDOT updated to Chapter 9-Title VI and Nondiscrimination Program Guidance for MPOs of the MPO Program Management Handbook in October 2015. The MPO will therefore update the Public Participation Plan to reflect the following requirements:
   
   - Ensure the Measures of effectiveness report details representative public involvement.
   - Develop a map with update community characteristics showing the
MPOs geographic area broken down by socioeconomic factors.

- List all MPO committees' members by race, ethnicity, age and whether or not disabled.

3. **Continue to improve the public participation and cooperation with our agency partners through better education of processes.** As evidenced the increased numbers of public comments and increased attendance at many of the MPO Board meetings and the media coverage many of the processes by which projects are prioritized for funding and advance are not fully understood by the public. We can work better together by collaborating more closely on documents such as the LRTP, TIP and FDOT District 7 work program, as well as major projects.

   For example, it would be beneficial to have the District share conceptual design plans as soon as possible so that we can ensure consistency between those plans and the MPO's adopted or pending long-range plans, TIPs, etc. It would also be useful for FDOT staff to be available to discuss major projects at LRTP outreach events before they get adopted into the LRTP.

   Lastly, we will request more complete information from FDOT on projects included in the TIP. For example, in the past, the "snapshot" of the adopted work program that becomes part of the TIP included data on project limits, lengths and the number of lanes existing/improved/added. Many capacity projects in the department's work program often only indicate "add lanes and reconstruct." Furnishing more complete information would ensure that the TIP is useful to the public.

   Given the many questions and misperceptions of the various processes and projects it is recommended an education campaign be designed with input from citizens to determine the best method (presentation, brochure, ad, app, webpage, video etc.) for explaining the project development process in plain English. The campaign should be launched with the next TIP cycle. It is also recommended the MPO update collateral public message materials as they are a bit dated.