Chapter 2. Community Engagement

Engagement Overview

Outreach to the public and key stakeholders is essential to understanding the transportation needs, issues, and values of those who live, work, and recreate in El Paso County. The project team sought input from the public in multiple phases as well as from stakeholders. Each phase of public engagement involved opportunities to comment on various aspects of the transportation system to understand stakeholder and community priorities, needs, and concerns for transportation. The sections below summarize each phase and highlight the results. The final section of this chapter summarizes outreach to various stakeholders, including municipal representatives, military personnel, developers, and other transportation advocates.

Phase 1 Public Engagement (June to September 2022)

Phase 1 engagement focused on listening to the public via digital and virtual engagement techniques and listening to stakeholders through a series of interviews. In addition, Phase 1 engagement established a qualitative understanding of mobility needs, issues, and opportunities to inform the MTCP's vision, goals, corridor needs, and support project development and prioritization. The project website, press releases, social media, *The Roadway* newsletter, and email blasts were used to solicit feedback.

Phase 1 Engagement Opportunities

Survey: A brief survey was conducted to get a better understanding of community preferences. The survey asked respondents about their current perceptions of the El Paso County transportation system as well as what they identified as topics of concern.

Idea Wall: The Idea Wall allowed the public to post general input about transportation in the County. The Idea Wall was crafted so that comments would be categorized by mode: Roads/Traffic, Transit, Biking, Walking, Safety, Other. Participants could "like" and "dislike" comments and reply with additional comments to further inform overall community sentiment.

Commenting Map: To complement the Idea Wall, the Social Pinpoint platform featured an online interactive commenting map where the public could provide location-specific comments about transportation issues, ideas, and concerns in El Paso County. Comment categories were as follows: Roadway Widening, Traffic Control, Paving Needs, Transit, Biking, Walking, and Safety. Participants could "like" and "dislike" comments and reply with additional comments to indicate consensus or not. In addition, the map featured an icon labeled "Maintenance" to allow participants to directly request maintenance help via a link to DPW's online customer request form to facilitate a convenient and timely entry into DPW's maintenance request system.

Engagement Audience by the Numbers

21K	Facebook followers	**840**	Total Social Pinpoint visits
11.5K	Twitter followers	**280**	Unique users
~ 500	People via email	**90**	Comments

Results

The following themes emerged from the three online engagement tools:

Roads/Traffic (11 comments):

Major themes include traffic congestion and safety. The intersection of Highway 105 and Roller Coaster Rd was identified as a particularly problematic intersection. Multiple comments described intense traffic delays (multiple signal cycles to go through) around areas of heavy commuter traffic and the need to plan in anticipation of rapid development and ensuing traffic increases.

Safety (12 comments):

Safety comments mentioned unsafe grades and that vehicle speeds are too high in a location with bicyclists and pedestrians. Several safety comments focused on concerns over drivers ignoring the speed limits (speeding). Overall, many comments touched on safety even if they chose another category to submit their comment in. This was a top priority across all modes of travel.

Roadway Widening/ Traffic Control (21/12 comments):

Several comments addressed major concerns over roadway capacities around areas of high, continued development (i.e., Monument, Falcon). Additional comments addressed the need to widen roads for traffic capacity, but also multimodal options such as bike lanes. Community members also expressed a desire to add streetlights to higher traffic intersections and around schools (e.g., Del Rio and Eastonville is specified as an area of concern). Other comments mentioned that proposed developments will increase traffic, and suggested ways to alleviate this potential congestion.

Transit/Biking/ Walking (11/8/6 comments):

Various locations were pointed out as needing Park and Rides built (along County Line Rd, CO 83, and I-25). The public identified a lack of infrastructure for both biking and transit. Particularly for biking, there are complaints that many roads are not suitable for biking due to safety reasons. Respondents also suggested that increased biking connections and safety are needed, including bike lanes throughout the county and bike crossings across I-25. In addition, community members suggested that increased pedestrian trail and sidewalk connectivity is needed around parks/golf courses and new development areas.

Paving Needs (5 comments):

Respondents mentioned that the road to the landfill has high truck volumes and needs to be paved. In addition, paved roads in specific areas would improve alternative routes and intersection flows.

Phase 1.5 Public Engagement Highlights (January to February 2023)

Phase 1.5 of outreach involved additional community engagement to garner input on the prioritization of the MTCP draft goals and to reconnect with the public between Phase 1 (Summer 2022) and Phase 2 (Spring 2023) of public engagement.

Engagement Opportunities

Community members were asked to rank the relative importance of the draft MTCP transportation goals. The goals can be found in the Transportation Goals section of this report on page 6.
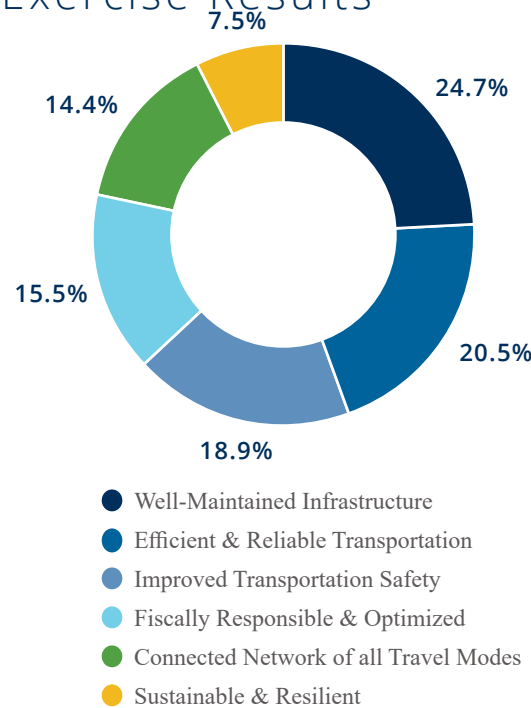
Results

"Well-Maintained Infrastructure" was the highest ranked goal among community members. "Efficient and Reliable Transportation" was the second highest ranked goal, "Improved Transportation Safety" was the third highest goal, and "Fiscally Responsible and Optimized" was the fourth highest goal. "Connected Network of all Travel Modes" was the fifth highest ranked goal, and "Sustainable and Resilient" was the lowest ranked goal, with nearly half of respondents ranking it as their fifth or sixth (out of 6) priority.

In addition, community members were given the opportunity to add their own goals in Question 2. Forty-six people entered text in the data field. Many provided commentary or suggested an action rather than a goal. Approximately 37 percent of these Question 2 responses listed action items, such as maintenance needs or where roads needed to be upgraded or widened.

Approximately 24 percent of responses provided additional commentary or context on goals, 15 percent of comments mentioned transit needs, 8 percent provided no comment. The remaining 15 percent suggested other goals. **Figure 3** shows these survey results.

Figure 3. Goal Ranking Exercise Results

- ● Well-Maintained Infrastructure
- ● Efficient & Reliable Transportation
- ● Improved Transportation Safety
- ● Fiscally Responsible & Optimized
- ● Connected Network of all Travel Modes
- ● Sustainable & Resilient

Phase 2 Public Engagement Highlights (March to April 2023)

Understanding the trade-offs and costs of transportation investments informs decision making. The purpose of Phase 2 was to present alternatives and consult the public on prioritization.

Phase 2 of Public Engagement was promoted through email blasts to subscribers, EPC Courier and *The Roadway* newsletter articles, outreach to committees and commissions, and project website announcements.

Engagement Opportunities

El Paso County posted an online Project Commenting Map to gather input on projects proposed in past and current transportation plans and studies. The Map featured more than 200 planned/recommended projects. Community members could comment on the following categories: Existing Roadway Improvements, Roadway Capacity, Paving/ Gravel, Safety, Bike/Pedestrian and Other.

El Paso County also posted a Budget Exercise to gather input on how community members would prioritize transportation spending. The interactive tool asked respondents to identify how they would spend $100 on a variety of categories: Upgrade County Roads, Improve Intersections, Expand Multimodal Options, Pave Gravel Roads, Add New Roadway Connections or Widen Roads, Incorporate Innovative Technologies, Improve Safety for All Modes, and Focus Improvements for People with Disabilities.

Engagement Audience by the Numbers

210 comments on the Project Commenting Map

113 comments on the Budget Exercise

Results

Figure 4 shows the following themes that emerged from the two online engagement tools:

### Safety

Safety included safety at intersections and the need for improved turn lanes, as well as the need for speed reduction measures and traffic calming.

Bike/Pedestrian

Bike/Pedestrian included adding new bike and pedestrian facilities, such as dedicated bike paths, connections between neighborhoods, schools, and existing bike/pedestrian infrastructure via safe routes.
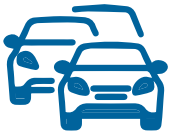
Roadway Capacity

Roadway Capacity included improvements and maintenance, the need to improve, continue construction on, or fund efforts related to several key highways and major roadways. Community members also mentioned the need for connection between roadways, improved intersections, and widening the roads.

Existing Roadway Improvements

Existing Roadway Improvements included intersection improvements, the need for capital maintenance such as resurfacing and widening.

There was a fair amount of variety in terms of comments in the "Other." Nearly half mentioned the need for various new park-n-ride locations. It is important to note that while the number of comments per category provides a snapshot of interest, seeing where people want to spend money can be more telling of actual priorities, as shown in **Figure 5**.
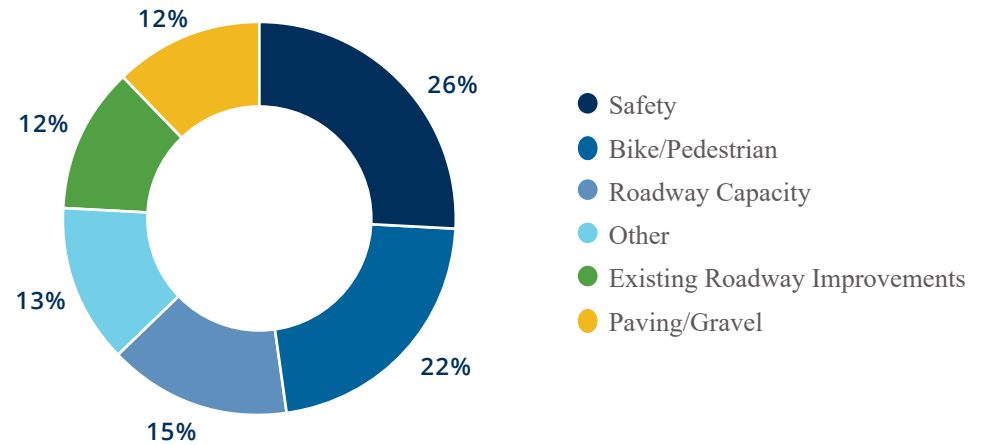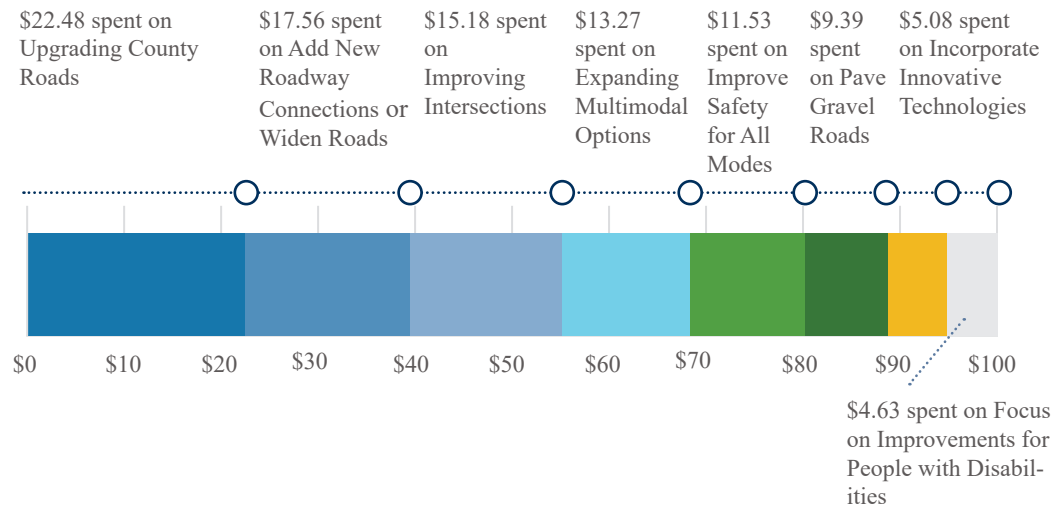
Figure 4. Project Commenting Map Results

- Safety — 26%
- Bike/Pedestrian — 22%
- Roadway Capacity — 15%
- Other — 13%
- Existing Roadway Improvements — 12%
- Paving/Gravel — 12%

Figure 5. How Community Members Spent $100

$22.48 spent on Upgrading County Roads

$17.56 spent on Add New Roadway Connections or Widen Roads

$15.18 spent on Improving Intersections

$13.27 spent on Expanding Multimodal Options

$11.53 spent on Improve Safety for All Modes

$9.39 spent on Pave Gravel Roads

$5.08 spent on Incorporate Innovative Technologies

$4.63 spent on Focus on Improvements for People with Disabilities

Stakeholder Engagement

It is important to coordinate with appropriate agencies, municipalities, relevant advisory committees, military bases, and the public throughout the entire MTCP process as stakeholders are essential to create a broad vision of transportation needs in El Paso County that can be used to help guide the planning for future roadways, connectivity, and their classifications. Stakeholders also provide input into how to best preserve the function of roadways over time through the development of goals and strategies.

Several major themes emerged during stakeholder outreach:

- Need for connections among the airport, existing roadways, neighborhoods, key destinations, and activity centers, and more by both car and multimodal options.

- Multimodal routes (trails and on-street) must be connected, accessible, and safe.

- Transit should be considered in the plan (Mountain Metro Transit (MMT), Bustang, and even Front Range Passenger Rail) even if not under EPC jurisdiction. Transit options are needed for commuters.

- Road improvements must coincide with development, particularly in mountainous towns. Multimodal travel within and between towns must be a feasible transportation option for those residents who choose to and are able to do so.

- Lack of east-west mobility across the county is a concern.

- Keep safety as a priority: reduce speeding and consider more acceleration or deceleration lanes.

- Improve pedestrian and bike path crossings.

- Park-n-rides must be planned, particularly in east EPC where developments are being built.

- Funding should come from federal sources as well as internal "county" sources.

- Prioritize maintenance on existing roadways.

- Any updated roadway standards must bring older rural roads up to date, consider existing and obtainable right-of-way (ROW), and promote safe travel. Roads over capacity facing increasing congestion should be the focus of improvements.