

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

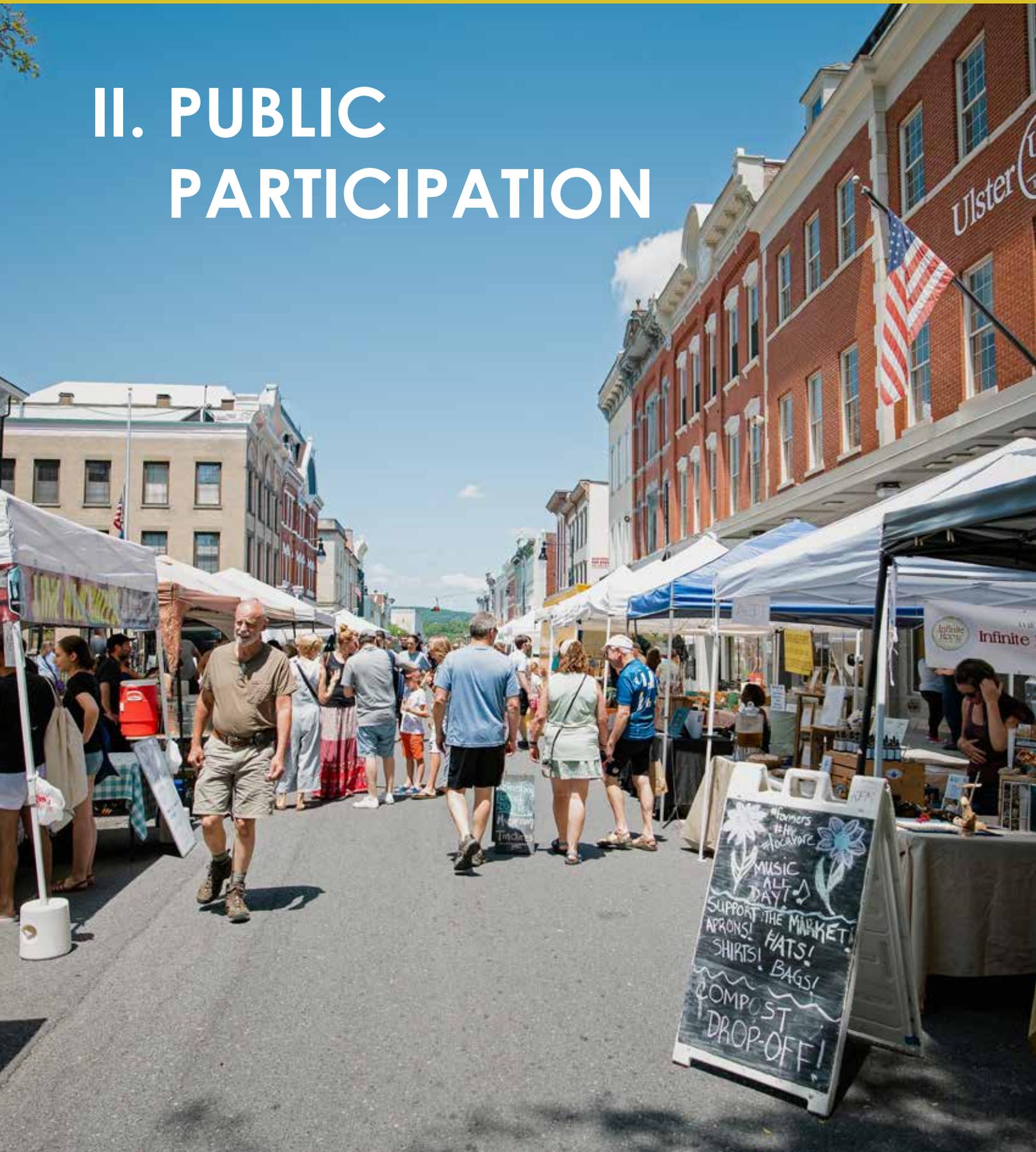


Photo by: Kevin Godbey

The MPO shall provide individuals, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, public ports, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation (including intercity bus operators, employer-based commuting programs, such as carpool program, vanpool program, transit benefit program, parking cashout program, shuttle program, or telework program), representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan using the participation plan developed under § 450.316(a).

The MPO shall publish or otherwise make readily available the metropolitan transportation plan for public review, including (to the maximum extent practicable) in electronically accessible formats and means, such as the World Wide Web.

23CFR§450.300 (Development and Content of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, Parts J & M)

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Plan 2045 was developed utilizing a collaborative and comprehensive approach to public participation. While the in-person effort was hampered by the restrictions imposed by the COVID19 Pandemic, UCTC was able to create a dynamic public involvement program using remote participation techniques coupled with unique advertising opportunities. Outreach efforts ran from June to August of 2020; the full results can be found in Appendix D.

The approach used falls into four categories

- ▶ Remote public workshops;
- ▶ Stakeholder roundtables with individuals in the private sector, interest groups, and non- governmental agencies;
- ▶ On-line Survey; and
- ▶ Media Coverage including Spanish speaking radio appearance.

PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

Four (4) virtual public meetings were held on August 11 and 12, 2020 with one in the afternoon and then again in the evening each day. Each workshop began with an overview of that explained the reason for the Plan, the requirements governing its contents, an explanation of key components and strategies and finally recommended projects for implementation. This overview was followed by the opportunity for the participants to be heard.

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS

A total of four (4) virtual stakeholder focus group discussions were held with transportation providers, regional institutions, bicycle/pedestrian advocates, community organizers, human service providers, and business entities. These discussions were designed to capture a better understanding of values, perceptions, and transportation priorities as well as future trends that these entities were already aware of, internally planning for or saw as future needs.

PUBLIC SURVEY

A concise electronic community survey was developed and implemented. Questions on the survey were designed to highlight the respondent’s understanding of the transportation system, their use and to elicit a strong sense of their priorities moving forward. The survey captured 365 responses including motorists, transit riders, pedestrians, bicyclists and those with mobility devices.

MEDIA COVERAGE

UCTC reached out to its media partners for coverage of the plan contents and their ability to encourage public participation. This outreach included an on-air Spanish translated interview with UCTC staff at a local radio station.



Screen grab from live stream of the 7/30/2020 UCTC interview with Mariel Fiori on Radio Kingston’s “La Voz” Spanish program. Staff discussed the purpose of the LRTP and encouraged the public to complete the online survey.

Every UCTC meeting is preceded by an opportunity for public comment on any subject relating to transportation or UCTC business.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION RESULTS

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS

Several important themes came to the forefront during the public participation process. These key themes and subjects are summarized below (categorized by major UCTC MTP Goal area and listed in no particular order):

System Preservation

- ▶ Condition of county roadways, bridges and related facilities is generally very good
- ▶ Concern in the local government’s ability to address a growing backlog of deferred maintenance in transportation infrastructure, particularly county bridges
- ▶ Ensuring that the system capacity of the 2 Hudson River bridges is managed and, if needed, improved
- ▶ Modernization of traffic signals, including removing redundant or unnecessary signals, should be strongly considered in urban centers

Economic Vitality

- ▶ Proximity to the New York Metropolitan Area will continue to have a significant influence on the area’s economy, particularly service, tourism, and housing markets and, consequently, transportation
- ▶ Hudson Valley continues to be an attractive place for young people to relocate too, but its affordability remains questionable

Safety

- ▶ The safety of some of the rural roads in Ulster County seems questionable in some locations due to traffic volume and design (vertical/horizontal curvature, narrow lanes, lack of shoulders) – applicable to motorists and cyclists
- ▶ Increased awareness of the need to “share the road” with cyclists has been noticeable, as well as an expansion of shared facilities such as ‘sharrows’ and separated bicycle lanes

Security

- ▶ (while not specifically mentioned as a security concern, a number of comments addressing Hudson River bridges and ports, roadway safety, economic security, resiliency, and transit reliability may also be applicable under Security)

Mobility & Reliability

- ▶ The dissolution of Kingston Citibus and expansion of UCAT service into the City of Kingston was a critical success; now the focus should be on future growth of the system and improved service;
- ▶ Expanding service will be a challenge given the difficulty finding drivers and sustained operating assistance
- ▶ Small number of significant “bottlenecks” i.e., congested corridors, and the limited options for fixing them
- ▶ Need to accommodate electronic assist bicycles and micro-mobility (such as scooters and bike shares) in the future
- ▶ Make transit free or more affordable for all residents and expand rideshare services



Kingston Greenline.



UCTC LRTP Public Meeting Flyer

ADA ACCESSIBILITY AND COMPLIANCE

UCTC has embarked on a multi-year effort to encourage and assist Ulster County municipalities with meeting compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on someone's disability. In 2016 UCTC partnered with its FHWA regional representative to provide a day long training to over 30 municipal staff on key issues pertaining to ADA compliance. The focus of the training was centered on the details of the law and the design and maintenance of pedestrian facilities (sidewalks, curb ramps, and other related features) that accommodate persons with disabilities in the public right-of-way. Municipalities are required to have a plan to make accommodations for everyone, commonly referred to as an ADA Transition Plan. To encourage Transition Plan initiation and completion, UCTC staff, working with New York State Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization guidance, digitized sidewalks in each municipality and assessed their condition. The information was compiled through a geographic information system and made available for download by each municipality.



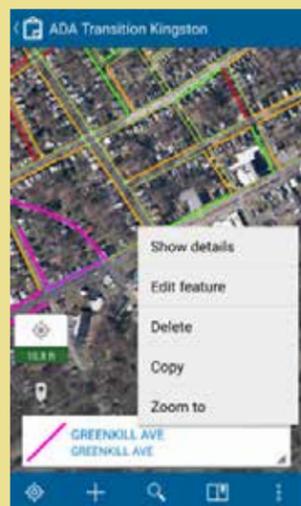
UCTC helped secure FTA funds to assist Trailways with making their Kingston bus facility ADA compliant.



Typical bluestone sidewalks in Kingston: ADA compliant vs. Non-compliant.



Municipal staff use wheelchairs and other devices to learn about the difficulties people with disabilities have while navigating the built environment.



Sidewalks were digitized by UCTC interns in 2019 and 2020 and their conditions were assessed in the field using ArcGIS collector, a mobile mapping app.

Accessibility and Connectivity

- ▶ Water access and port development is a critical consideration
- ▶ The expansion of Ulster County's non-motorized trail system is a major success, which has grown to become an important asset for recreation, tourism and transportation;
- ▶ Rural transit service needs improvement
- ▶ Continued need for improving access to transit service, particularly first mile/last mile connections, and expanding service frequency throughout the county. This is directly related to travel mode share and limited trip choices.
- ▶ Accessibility of urban areas, particularly ADA sidewalk compliance
- ▶ Accommodating local freight and delivery services without increasing congestion or sacrificing quality of life
- ▶ Need for transit travel training, particularly for younger residents who can become future customers
- ▶ Need to create a universal booking platform for planning and purchasing trips on public and private transportation services, particularly Trailways, UCAT, Metro North/MTA and other surrounding transit services.
- ▶ Integrating connections between intercounty transit providers is a major challenge
- ▶ Three exists off of the NYS Thruway is a major benefit for Ulster County residents and its economy
- ▶ Improving trail/neighborhood connections will be an important consideration moving forward
- ▶ Access to 2 Hudson River bridges is an often-overlooked benefit of Ulster County



Engineering consultants conduct a site visit with U.C. Planning staff and Community Advisory Committee.

Protect and Enhance the Environment

- ▶ Importance of continued electrification of public and private fleets and improving access for charging
- ▶ Resiliency planning for transportation infrastructure and land use has been occurring and will be of critical importance moving forward
- ▶ Tropical events have had a significantly adverse impact on Ulster County transportation facilities and the need for transportation resiliency planning will not diminish over time
- ▶ Preservation of environmental and historical assets while improving and modernizing transportation facilities is a critical consideration that should be incorporated into the vision

Equity

- ▶ Need to recognize the importance of equity in the transportation planning process
- ▶ Need to ensure that benefits of improved mobility are experienced across all spectrums of our communities and not just among those who can afford them.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey (both English and Spanish versions) was unveiled on July 13, 2020 and remained open through August 4, 2020. A total of 365 people responded to the survey, with 364 responses to the English survey and one response to the Spanish survey. The responses show that a large majority (84.9%) of the respondents live or live and work in Ulster County, indicating that the survey successfully reached its targeted audience.



Word cloud produced from over 350 of the UCTC survey responses received in the summer of 2020.

The survey was promoted via English and Spanish virtual flyers on UCTC’s LRTP webpage and Ulster County’s social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). These were also distributed to UCTC stakeholders via a press release and to participants of the stakeholder discussions that were conducted as part of the LRTP’s public outreach process. Additionally, the virtual survey flyers were shared with the Town Clerk/Supervisor/Communication Director and a member of the Planning Board for each municipality in the County, in addition to all libraries, most land conservancies and land trusts, bike shops and bike clubs, food establishments near rail trails, grocery stores, farmers market managers, and representatives from a wide range of environmental, social service, and educational non-profits. The English and Spanish survey information was also shared on La Voz magazine’s social media platforms and on the La Voz con Mariel Fiori on Radio Kingston show via an interview with Brian Slack from UCTC.

Survey Demographics

- ▶ Over 80 percent live (43%) or live and work (41.9%) in Ulster County. Only 5.2% work in Ulster County but live outside of the County.
- ▶ Almost two-thirds of participants are between 35 and 64 years old. The 35-44 age cohort is the largest (23.0%), followed by the 55-64 age cohort (21.6%), and the 45-54 age cohort (20.4%). Another 20% of participants are in the 65-84 age cohort and 16% are in the 20-34 age range.
- ▶ More participants are female (56.7%) than male (38.5%).
- ▶ Most participants are non-Hispanic (95%), White (89.3%), followed by 4% Asian participants, and 4% Black/African American.

Travel Mode and Trip Purpose (Pre-COVID-19)

- ▶ Driving is the most common mode for most trip purposes
- ▶ About half of participants walk/use a wheelchair (25.2%) or ride a bike (21.9%) for recreation and exercise.

Vision Statement and Goals

- ▶ Over two-thirds of participants strongly agree (45%)/agree (22%) with the Vision Statement and 23% are neutral or unsure.
- ▶ Out of all eight Draft Plan goals, accessibility and connectivity, transportation equity, and safety are ranked the highest. When asked what is missing from the goals, participants emphasize improving and expanding infrastructure and service for non-motorized active transportation modes and transit.



Route 9W in the Town of Ulster

Wish List Improvements

- ▶ The top five improvements identified are: a more robust and resilient transit system, better bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, light rail, free public transit, and better rail/train access.

Travel Mode and Trip Purpose (Pre-COVID-19)

- ▶ Half of the participants work from home (WFH) at least three days per week post-COVID, while 14.8% of participants regularly go to their work location. Less than five percent of respondents were laid off/furloughed or lost their job.
- ▶ Over a quarter of participants think that their employers will allow them to WFH in the future; 21% of participants think their employers will not continue this practice.
- ▶ Most indicate that they have been traveling and driving less overall for non-essential trips (shopping and dining out) and staying at home/closer to home more. Many indicate that they have been biking and walking more, with some limiting their use of public transit or avoiding it entirely.



Residents enjoying the Walkkill Valley Rail Trail. Photo: Daily Freeman.