

Chapter 2 Public Engagement

The Importance of Public Input in Creating the Plan

From April 2015 through October 2016, MTA/RTA have actively sought the opinions of Middle Tennesseans as they studied the state-of-the-art transit strategies now being deployed around the world and explored in depth the values and transit needs of this population. Through these efforts, nearly 20,000 individual engagements took place, including 9,000 responses to an online “scenario” survey asking people to express their preferences with respect to three alternate futures for mass transit and regional mobility. The overwhelming response was that Nashville and the Middle Tennessee region should pursue a bold, long-term investment in mass transit, along with ancillary investments in infrastructure to make such a system effective.

MTA and RTA have worked hard to ensure that this plan reflects the desires of Middle Tennessee’s residents and other major stakeholders such as the business community, and other major institutions. To do this, at the beginning of the nMotion planning process in April 2015, MTA and RTA set a goal of 10,000 engagements.¹ Through the middle of September, 2016, the project has produced more than 19,000 engagements.

FIGURE 2-1 | ENGAGEMENTS THROUGH JULY 2016



These included:

- Over 3,000 specific comments
- Over 15,000 survey responses
- Community meetings with over 30 groups in 10 counties
- Transit Talks with over 80 organizations throughout Middle Tennessee
- Over 100 news articles
- Over 700 Twitter followers
- Over 2,000 Facebook fans
- Emails to over 8,000 people and organizations

In addition, there have been nearly 33,000 unique visitors to the project’s website.

A detailed description of the public engagement process for nMotion is available in Appendix 6.

¹ An engagement is a submitted survey or a comment received via nMotion2016.org, comment cards, Facebook, Twitter or Nextdoor, or on various media websites. Some individuals have engaged with nMotion more than once during the process.

FIGURE 2-2 | PUBLIC MEETING COMMENTS



FIGURE 2-3 | EAST NASHVILLE PUBLIC MEETING



Development of Goals

At the very beginning of the project, MTA and RTA incorporated initial feedback into four goals that guided development of the plan:

- **CONNECT:** Connect people to life in Middle Tennessee
- **ENHANCE:** Make transit a competitive travel choice for more Middle Tennesseans
- **SIMPLIFY:** Make transit easy to use
- **SUSTAIN:** Develop a transit system that complements and advances broader regional goals and is financially sustainable in the long term

Then, between April and December 2015, the nMotion team engaged Nashville-area residents about future trade-offs for services and potential transit strategies.

Development of Scenarios

In early 2016, MTA and RTA developed and released three potential future transit improvement scenarios for public review and comment. These included:

1. Scenario 1, which presented improvements designed to produce a “**Comprehensive Regional System**” (which was most similar to the recommendations presented in this document).
2. Scenario 2, which presented a more modest package of “**Bus-Focused Expansion.**”
3. Scenario 3, which consisted of “**Modest Improvements**” designed to grow the system generally in line with population growth.

Beginning in February 2016, MTA and RTA asked Middle Tennesseans what they liked – and didn’t like – about the three future scenarios for the region’s transit system. Responses were collected using a colorful survey pamphlet and MetroQuest, an online survey tool. An original visual campaign was created to advertise the

survey and encourage input using the slogan “Decide Your Ride.” Over 9,000 people responded to the survey.

Public Input on the Scenarios

The large majority of input received was supportive of a large investment in a regionwide transit system. Some common themes expressed by survey responders include:

- We are behind other cities in developing transit options.
- We have already waited too long to address traffic issues.
- We don’t want to become “the next Atlanta.”
- A large investment over 25 years is needed to create new transit options.
- People have no intention of giving up driving, but would like to be less dependent on their cars and have other options.
- They think it will help Nashville and Middle Tennessee continue to recruit millennials and young professionals.
- Many are skeptical that large numbers of Middle Tennesseans will ever ride buses, leading many to prefer a rail solution.
- As in the Amp debate, people remain conflicted about dedicated lanes for transit. While most perceive dedicated lanes will be necessary to improve transit travel times and reliability, they also remain skeptical about how dedicated lanes would impact overall traffic flow.

Finally, an overwhelming number of respondents recognize that robust mass transit must be accompanied by good sidewalks and easier access to transit stops and stations.

Draft Recommendations

Based on the input received on the scenarios, MTA and RTA produced and publicized draft recommendations. These draft recommendations were most similar to Scenario 1, and very similar to the plan described in Chapter 3.



Middle Tennesseans then had the opportunity to review the draft recommendations and voice their opinions

- At three community open houses
- At a panel discussion co-hosted by The Tennessean
- On the nMotion2016.org website
- On Facebook, Twitter and Nextdoor
- At three community events

Public Input on the Draft Recommendations

Overall, people are supportive of the transit recommendations, and many want to see new transit projects begin as soon as possible. Others were apprehensive about the \$6 billion cost. Common themes included:

- Strong approval of the plan and all of the proposed improvements
- A sense that Middle Tennessee is already behind, and that



improvements are needed as soon as possible.

- A desire among current transit users for improvements to existing service before big investments in high-capacity services like rail.
- A desire for premium options for surrounding counties, especially given the \$6 billion cost.

While the large majority of input was supportive, there was also opposition, largely due to the cost of the plan. Many who support for the plan also expressed concerns about the cost. Finally, many also expressed frustration that the plan will take 25 years to fully implement.