



Including more voices in transit and community development decision-making

Successes and lessons learned from including more diverse and community-based voices on the Powell-Division Transit and Development project are helping shape the future of decision making at Metro.

Powell-Division Transit and Development project created a locally approved plan for rapid bus on Division Street and local Action Plans to support housing, local business and community goals.

A new model for the steering committee

Early on, project partners wanted to pilot a new approach to the decision-making committee with the intent of diversifying perspectives and elevating community-identified needs and solutions. Including community representation on decision-making committees is an emerging best practice in collaborative public policy, and part of Metro's commitment to increasing widespread understanding of and access to regional decision making.

The steering committee's 22 members included educational institutions, neighborhood groups, youth and community-based organizations, as well as elected officials, local jurisdictions and transit and transportation agencies used to being at the table. For nearly three years the committee worked toward the successful creation of an action plan for future rapid bus service and a set of equitable development objectives and actions for key places throughout the Powell-Division corridor.

Having diverse community representation on the steering committee shaped the project goals and objectives. This held partners accountable for considering equity and community goals while guiding decisions on the transit project.

After the steering committee completed its three years of work, staff conducted evaluations with steering committee members and staff from local jurisdictions and transportation agencies who worked with the committee.

The survey included nine questions that focused on several aspects of the steering committee, including membership, preparation, expectations, decision making, meetings and materials, and staff and agency partner roles. Metro staff invited all steering committee members and 13 project staff to provide feedback via an online survey, phone call or in-person discussion. A total of 15 steering committee members and 11 project staff provided feedback.

Evaluation goals

- Identify strengths and challenges of a new steering committee model for transit planning
- Improve how Metro manages future steering committees and advisory groups
- Understand and improve Metro's role as lead agency, convener and community partner



Key takeaways: Responses from committee members and project staff

Steering committee membership

- The diversity of perspectives on the steering committee built the capacity of both community groups and jurisdictional representatives to engage in collaborative, respectful decision making.
- It was a space to bring up tough topics and an opportunity to be in the messy part of planning together.
- It was important that many equity voices were at the table—don't tokenize equity with just one member.
- Future committees should continue to include a diversity of groups including riders with disabilities, advocates for biking, transit riders, students, business community, immigrants and refugees, communities of color.
- In all settings it is important to continue the work of building trust between agencies and community.

Expectations for committee roles and project outcomes

- Provide more clarity to committee members about what happens with their work and their recommendations. Be clear if the committee is bringing ideas to the table but others are making the decisions.
- Vet technical and financial information sooner so that expectations for what the project can be don't get too built up.
- Delineate between when the committee and community are providing visioning input, versus making specific project decisions.
- Have more discussions to clarify what problem the project is trying to solve.
- Staff and jurisdictional representatives should do a better job of discussing the context that transit planning projects are unpredictable and often shift and change in scope.

Combining transit and community development

- Continue conversations about the pros and cons of having the same committee making decisions about and transit project planning and community development.
- You can't divorce a transit project from everything else.
- It can be confusing to broaden the scope of transit project to include housing and development if you don't have the right people at the table.
- Work to set the table with people who can address the issues that the committee will address.

Meeting and materials

- Create more opportunities for committee members to meet outside of meetings to create cohesion.
- Create more opportunities for discussion among committee members; less presentation by experts.
- Make time for community members to present to steering committee members and vice versa, this would help shine light on others' points of view.

Being prepared

- Staff should continue to find ways to be accessible to committee members and multiple ways to help them be prepared for meetings.
- Provide information in advance of steering committee meetings with ample time for committee members to review the information and ask questions before being asked to make a decision.
- Staff should be responsive to providing information when it is requested.