



## LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY PLAN FOCUS GROUPS

### SUMMARY OF TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

#### DECEMBER 2021

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#### Introduction

In December 2021, Lara Media Services (LMS) conducted focus groups in Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese to help inform Metro's update to its Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan. LMS gathered qualitative and quantitative data through dynamic virtual focus groups and survey questions. While most of the focus group discussion was about language access across all Metro programs and services, the groups also discussed community needs and priorities related to transportation. Focus group participants completed a questionnaire that included questions about transportation priorities. **The results of the focus groups and questionnaire related to transportation are summarized in this document. These discussions will help inform Metro's 2023 Regional Transportation Plan update.** The comprehensive focus group report is included in Appendix D of Metro's 2021 Limited English Proficiency Plan.

LMS organized, recruited, facilitated, and captured the sentiments of community members who identify as a person of limited English proficiency. The methodology is described in Attachment A to this summary. LMS organized, coordinated, and conducted four virtual focus groups in four different languages: Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, and Mandarin, with a minimum of nine participants per group.

#### Focus group results

Most groups' primary areas of interest related to transportation were roads and public transportation. They focused less on sidewalks and bike paths. Participants in the Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Spanish groups appeared most interested in

significant road improvements. In contrast, the Russian group was most interested in addressing public transportation needs, such as more bus and Max signage in their language. The summary below includes first high-level themes across all focus groups followed by summaries of each focus group.

**Public Transportation (all focus groups):**

Although a significant proportion of participants used public transportation, many found it unreliable, ineffective, difficult to use with children, and many disliked it due to the lack of control over their time and environment. Most believed it was difficult to use public transit due to the lack of stations near their preferred or essential destinations, such as hospitals, grocery stores, and restaurants.

Participants in the suburban areas saw it as an unrealistic form of transportation due to the travel time, the distance of destinations, and the cost of constant travel. They said that system is more effective for highly urbanized areas, such as Central Portland versus West Linn.

Many also agreed that the metro area needed more bus stops to make the system more accessible. Participants would also like bus stops and Max stations to be better maintained. They asked for more stops and stations to be covered to protect against the elements, to be more family-friendly, and to have more seating.

**Roads (all focus groups):**

The main concern about roads is the ongoing traffic issues when commuting in Portland. Many suggest opening new carpool lanes or building new freeway off-ramps and on-ramps to help offset the traffic build-up. Several also asked for better-maintained roads and fixed potholes. Some wanted Metro to prioritize local roads as many residential areas have received little maintenance.

Another main focal point was road safety. Many participants are concerned with the amount of lighting on roads and sidewalks, noting that an increase in lighting and reflective signs would help road safety around Portland when traveling at night or in the dark.

Others believe the growing homeless population is also a safety hazard, especially around roadways and public transit stations. Drivers are worried about the tendency of people to cut across busy roads. Public transit commuters feel uncomfortable with the increased presence, even opting to use more private means of transportation.

**Bicycle Paths (all focus groups):**

Bike paths were commonly viewed as an ineffective mode of transportation because it takes too long to get somewhere, and there are not enough bike paths available to provide riders safe access to many areas. They also comment that getting access to a bike is expensive and unrealistic, especially for larger families and people with more than one job. They see it as a solution for a "utopian community" but not a real solution for BIPOC and low-income families. However, many expressed a need for safer bike paths, suggesting that broader bike paths be built and be more distinguishable.

**Sidewalks/Walkways (all focus groups):**

Overall there was little focus on sidewalks. Although of those that commented, participants agreed that all sidewalks should be kept clean and well maintained. Some noted that many areas required more or wider sidewalks for better use and pedestrian safety.

**COVID 19 Impact (all focus groups):**

Covid has highly impacted our BIPOC communities and caused many changes to transportation use. Many participants had to cease or diminish their use of public transportation and began using more private means of transportation whenever possible. However, many participants plan to return to their usual pre-Covid methods as restrictions lessen or proper Covid protocol is established and followed.

**Results from Vietnamese focus group****Transportation**

The Vietnamese community focused on private transportation and road changes more than any other group. Many participants advocated fixing 82nd Avenue as this road is vital for Vietnamese businesses and needs more driving and parking spaces. Conversely, many advocated against Division Street's renovations and disapproved of similar renovations taking place elsewhere.

Others had issues with road layouts and were displeased with the placement of parking spaces outside of bike spaces on streets due to safety concerns and noted that the need for the right lane for cars was more significant than the need for bus-only lanes.

The participants also disapproved of the I-205 toll, highlighting the class divide and noting that low-income families struggle to pay the toll daily. They believed that this

would add more significant burdens to them and the Vietnamese community on top of increased taxes. Although, some argued that they would perceive the toll as more reasonable if I-205 was to be rebuilt or a new bridge added.

### **COVID-19 Impacts on transportation**

Many in this community experienced no changes before the pandemic as most prefer and have access to private means of transportation.

### **Results from Mandarin focus group**

#### **Transportation**

Most of the participants' knowledge on this topic was about direct transit services like TriMet, Hop cards, light rail, and Max lines. Many members had difficulty grasping Metro's role with transportation if it wasn't about any of the services mentioned.

Several expressed the need to address the increasing heavy Portland traffic. Commuting into downtown and the Portland metro area has worsened over the years, and members wish to see policy changes to improve traffic flow. Many agree that new freeway off-ramps could be a way of improving the traffic jams that occur during rush hours. There was more focus on freeways rather than streets. Most seemed more comfortable driving and believed it to be a more effective means of transportation overall.

### **COVID-19 Impacts on transportation**

Regarding Covid-19, many believe it would be advantageous to highlight Covid-19 precautions and mandates at stations in multiple languages to ensure commuters abide

### **Results from Spanish focus group**

#### **Transportation**

Many community members wished buses had more stops and for public transit to be punctual. They believe that putting more buses into circulation would help more people get to their destination on time. However, the Spanish-speaking community had a more significant focus on biking and walking safety concerns.

Several participants noted that bikes are often stolen when left alone and that bringing them as an alternate form of transportation is often not a good or viable option. One participant mentioned the need for a program to teach people to ride

bikes and help provide affordable bicycles to increase bike path usage and prevent future safety concerns regarding bicyclists.

Participants believe that more safe road crossings are needed for pedestrians. They like the idea of cameras, and ways to record how fast people are driving would lower the rate of car accidents due to speeding both near high population areas and urban residences. One participant proposed using funds to ensure safe railroad crossings for pedestrians.

But regardless of preferred transportation methods, most participants wanted more information, such as routes, timetables, and maps to be easily accessible. Many suggested adding information to any and all public transit sites, specifically mentioning bus stops, TriMet, and Max stations.

### **Results from Russian focus group**

#### **Transportation**

Transportation is a critical issue that most participants had many concerns about. They would like to have more direct access to more areas without changing buses and lines as this becomes quite expensive.

Public transportation riders would also appreciate more lighting around bus stops and max stations and roads. Many feel uneasy waiting in the early morning, especially around Downtown Portland or other inner-city areas. The fear of traveling in the dark keeps many people participating in community events.

Additionally, more Trimet information in Russian was requested as there are very few resources available in Russian, and several participants highlighted the difficulty of getting driving instruction and a license as a foreign immigrant.

#### **COVID-19 Impact**

While most Covid-19 changes led to a decreased use of public transportation since school children no longer had access to school buses, most began to ride the TriMet almost daily. This situation also caused parents to worry as many children reported having felt unsafe on public transportation due to the behavior of other riders during necessary transit.

## Survey results

### Mandarin focus group survey responses

Why do you believe the answers above are important? Do you think it is important that government agencies address this? What other issues should be addressed?

1. It's very important. The traffic congestion problem in Portland is now very serious. Children's indoor and outdoor activities, rainy season and winter, children need more indoor activity space, for example, more children's community [centers].
2. The problem of homeless people and garbage in the city center urgently needs to be dealt with by the government.
3. Because of community safety, which is important, how to deliver messages to [a] specific community is important.
4. Housing and roads
5. I think the transportation in Portland is so bad, and it is very important for the government to focus on it.
6. Now, because of the epidemic, most people travel by themselves, such as shopping and picking up children [from] school. So I think road safety is very important, as well as the maintenance of traffic lights, especially the traffic lights on Division Street.
7. Climate change. Increasing access to nature and outdoors through working with culturally specific organizations like the Taiwanese Association of Greater Portland.
8. It is important because, with a growing population, the road will become more congested in the future. It is important to have the infrastructure in place to accommodate commutes in a safe and efficient manner.
9. It is related to everyone's life and commuting time every day. It is necessary to reduce commuting time, increase safety and convenience.
10. These problems are long-standing problems that require continuous efforts to improve and are closely related to our daily lives. The government is committed to solving these problems and can improve the quality of life of residents. I think some [streets] are congested with traffic, and in some areas, even on weekends, it is inconvenient for residents to commute and takes a long time. The government should improve the road system and distribute the traffic to make it easier for everyone to attend work.
11. Necessary, the traffic jam is too serious now.

### **Vietnamese focus group survey responses**

1. [The] police force needs to be highly considered, giving police a priority to protect people and public property and businesses.
2. I hope to have more [affordable] houses or apartments.
3. Homelessness is on the rise in Portland; action is needed
4. Expanding the bus and Max system will help reduce traffic congestion, which in turn will contribute to climate change [due to vehicle smoke].
5. Human life is important; minimizing [homelessness] is best.
6. I believe government regulation is important to encourage people to carpool, etc., to reduce the traffic on the road. [A] Government road plan.
7. Homeless problem
8. [The] homeless population in the Metro area is out of control. We need more affordable housing for people, including BIPOC. Also, please plan to have a parking lot of those housing as well. No parking on the street.
9. This problem is important because it reduces traffic jams and accidents... The problem that needs to be solved now is homelessness and theft.
10. Homeless, safety

What is the primary way you get around?

1. Car (95.65%)
2. Carpool (4.35%)

### **Spanish focus group survey responses**

Which of the following issues is most important to address with transportation?

1. Fewer deaths and severe injuries on our roads
2. Reduce the impacts our cars, buses, and trucks have on climate change (T-2)
3. Expand the bus and max system (T-2)

Why do you believe the answers above are important? Do you think it is important that government agencies address this? What other issues should be addressed?

1. These are matters that are expected to be provided by government agencies.
2. Homeless, homeless people, but the most important thing is the insecurity that currently exists.
3. Transportation [to] hospitals for immigrants
4. For me, it is very important to take care of the planet, to educate ourselves to recycle. Also to be able to have childcare more accessible to everyone, because that is the basis of their future, I also think that parks should have more fun areas for young people and not only for children, I think there is a lack of places for young people [to] stay busy.

5. Yes, the Governor [should address issues]
6. Community safety and street lighting
7. Because it is important
8. Because there have been many deaths and the safety of us and our children [are important].
9. The transportation system is important and provides access to resources for all people, so expanding the max and bus system would allow more people to be able [to] use community resources and enhance their quality of life.

What is the primary way you get around?

1. Bus/Max (55.56%)
2. Car (33.33%)
3. Bike (11.11%)

### **Russian focus group survey responses**

Which of the following issues is most important to address with transportation?

1. Expand the Bus and Max
2. Fewer deaths and severe injuries on our roads

Why do you believe the answers above are important? Do you think it is important that government agencies address this? What other issues should be addressed?

1. I know some people of [the] Portland area live in places without bus stops. Unfortunately, a lot of Russian immigrants [do] not earn a lot of money. That's why they cannot afford to pay for the car or taxi. Also, information about new routes will let people choose new places [to] rent or buy houses in [the] future.
2. Safety is important
3. I think this is very important.  
Yes, I think it's important.
4. This is [a] very important issue for me and people who live in my apartment complex in West Linn. We do not have a bus stop nearby. People have to take Uber to get to the bus stop on Highway 43. This is very expensive and inconvenient. Public transportation issues should be addressed by local or county authorities.
5. Homeless
6. Property taxes, homeless people
7. It is important. [Transportation] needs to be made more accessible for Russian-speaking people.
8. Yes. These are very important issues and need to be addressed.
9. Safety. More bus lines.



What is the primary way you get around?

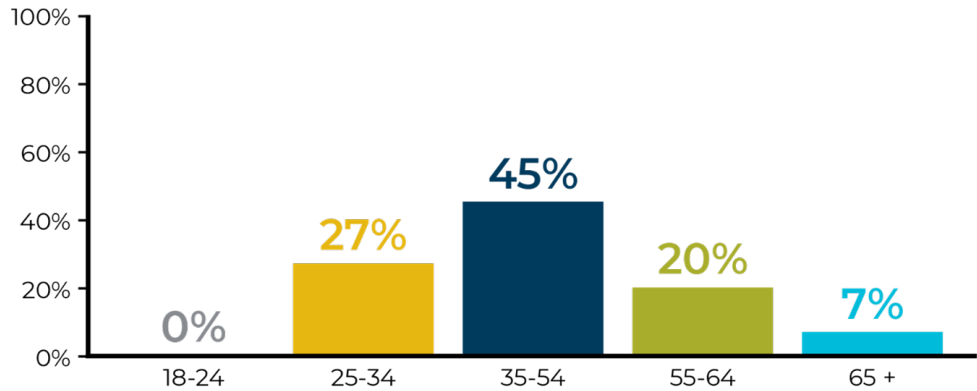
1. Car (58.33%)
2. Bus/Max (33.33 %)
3. Walk (8.33%)

**Participant demographics (focus groups aggregated)**

The following questions were optional, though all 44 participants provided this information.

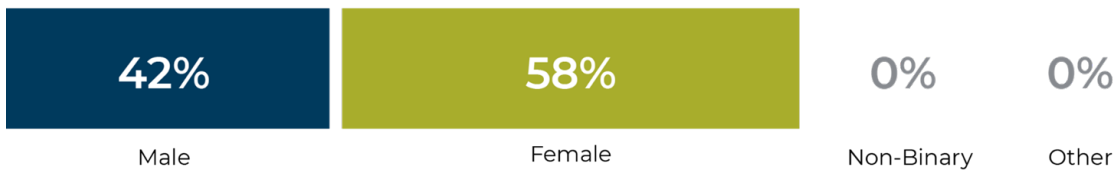
**Figure 1: Participant Age - LEP Survey**

What is your age?



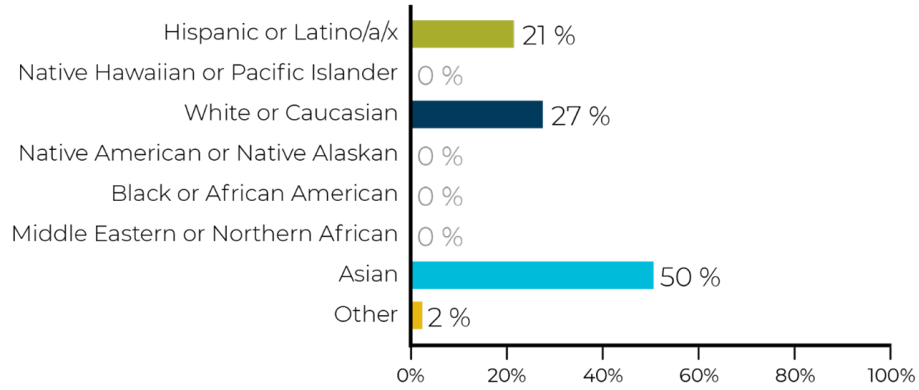
**Figure 2: Gender - LEP Survey**

Which of the following best represents your gender?



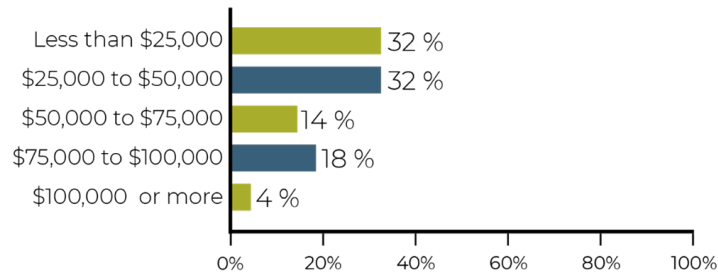
**Figure 3: Race/Ethnicity - LEP Survey**

When asked about your racial or ethnic identity, how do you identify?



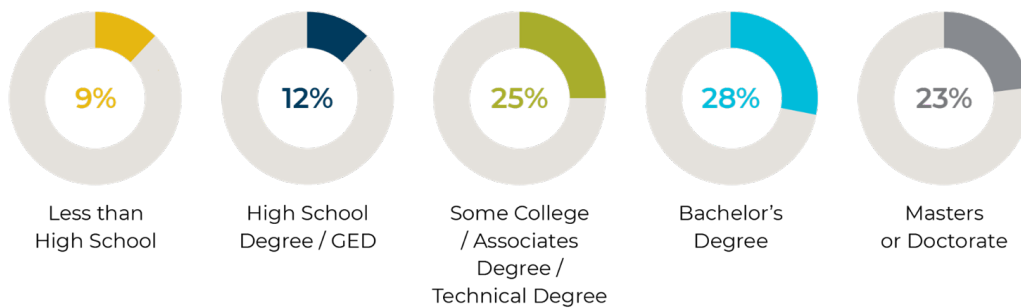
**Figure 4: Household income**

In 2020, What was your household income?



**Figure 5: Education**

What is your highest level of education?



## **Closing remarks**

Participants thanked LMS and Oregon Metro for the opportunity to engage and share their thoughts, opinions, and ideas. The facilitators who conducted the conversations were astounded by the level of engagement from the communities.

LEP communities are open, interested, and willing to participate in Metro's projects and the processes needed to make them happen. They see the importance and value of expressing their opinions and needs. Most of the participants were first or second-generation immigrants. They are generally younger and continue working for more hours than their white counterparts. They come from countries where gathering information from the public is different and not present. The community members want to contribute but do not have practice with similar processes from their home country.

LMS believes that each community has its unique challenges and needs, but the contributions, dreams, values, and barriers are similar. They want to engage and be engaged. Each group has community members interested in being part of the planning Metro manages. Metro will need to work on its communication strategy to access these willing communities of limited English proficiency. LMS has an obligation to the participants involved in this research to relay to Metro that they and their communities want to participate in the planning process.

Participants in the focus groups were most interested in understanding the resources available in their locality. They wanted clear, direct, and concise information, with the option to read more if desired in a timely way. They want to provide ideas for projects and be involved in policy-making and planning. Community members also want an array of options to engage with Metro, especially for those who don't have the access required to engage electronically, such as the hardware or the experience of navigating resources virtually. These communities may be good with technology in general, but they will need training on using the tools required to be involved with Metro.

## **Acknowledgment**

Lara Media Services thanks Metro for this opportunity to connect with the hearts and minds of Limited English Proficiency communities in the Portland Metro Area. From doing this outreach and research, it is evident that there are many opportunities in the future waiting to unfurl.

## ATTACHMENT A - METHODOLOGY

LMS coordinated and hosted four focus groups. LMS hired community members to conduct the focus groups in Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The Mandarin and Vietnamese focus groups were held Wednesday, November 18, 2021, while the Russian and Spanish focus groups were held Thursday, November 19, 2021.

The four languages were identified as the most frequently spoken languages, other than English, in the greater Portland region. Metro conducted the language analysis using the following data sources:

- 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year estimates, aggregated by census public use microdata areas (PUMAs)
- 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year estimates, aggregated by census tracts
- Oregon Department of Education (ODE): 2018-2019 school year enrollment data for school districts in Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties.

Participants were required to have access to an electronic device with a camera and microphone to participate in the focus groups. LMS offered to lend tablets to participants in need of electronic devices; none were requested. LMS also offered Zoom Video conferencing training to all participants who requested assistance; two requested training.

LMS gathered qualitative and quantitative data through dynamic virtual focus groups and survey questions. The focus groups consisted of fourteen questions about Metro, places, programs, service knowledge, participants' use of media and translation programs, and transportation. A follow-up survey was filled out by each participant with questions about transportation priorities, trusted information sources, and optional demographic questions. The focus groups were 120 minutes. All participants were compensated \$100 for their time.

Focus group participants were from the Portland Metro Area and have limited English proficiency or understand the needs of those who have limited English proficiency.

With over 100 people showing interest in participating, LMS screened and confirmed 48 participants. Forty-four attended and participated in the conversations. Each focus group included nine to 12 participants from all three Portland Metro region counties: Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties. The Vietnamese group consisted of 11 participants, nine from Multnomah County, one from Washington, and one from Clackamas. The Mandarin group consisted of

twelve participants: seven from Multnomah County, three from Washington County, and two from Clackamas County. The Spanish group consisted of nine participants: six participants from Multnomah County, two from Washington County, and one from Clackamas County. The Russian group consisted of twelve participants, five from Multnomah County, four from Washington County, and three from Clackamas County.