

D6  
Public Involvement

LISTENING TO THE ONES WHO KNOW

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During 2015, the Douglas County (Georgia) Transportation Services Study, led by the County's Multi-Modal/Rideshare Division, provided an opportunity for County residents; community stakeholders; and business, educational, and political leaders to actively participate in a forward-thinking, customer-driven approach to transportation planning. The study helped the County leaders and citizens think about the factors that influence both residents' **current and future transportation needs**. More specifically, citizens were asked to consider how demographic, economic, technological, and social changes would likely impact their mobility needs in the future. *In short, the entire study was focused on creating an environment for Douglas County citizens to **express their mobility needs and preferences**, rather than having a team of technical experts define the needs, which is the traditional approach for transportation studies.*

Under the direction of the County Board of Commissioners, the study's primary focus was on interacting with and listening to citizens and stakeholders about how existing services should be improved and how and where new services could meet specific needs, such as enabling more seniors to access medical and retail services and become less isolated, helping workers access jobs, and providing ways to move between key activity centers. The study sought to identify and evaluate a menu of transportation service options and enhancements that had broad community support in order to make sure that County investments meet residents' travel needs and are targeted to the most important needs now and in the future.

Through a series of engaging activities, including presence at community festivals, town halls, community leader interviews, and an extensive and popular on-line service, the study team gathered input from over 1,400 community members (from a county population of about 135,000 people). In this way, the study was able to consider transportation options for people regardless of age, income, ability, or travel purpose and to identify a comprehensive, flexible program of services that County leaders could adapt to meet changing conditions due to economic conditions, social trends, emerging technology, and available resources.

The Douglas County Transportation Services Study is an example of a customer-focused approach to transportation planning, one centered on understanding community needs and preferences that uses that information to guide decisions about future transportation investments. This paper and presentation describe creative approaches to drawing a range of people into a planning process in an area that is at once urban, suburban, and rural, as well as techniques for getting meaningful input from groups often left out of traditional planning processes. They address the study's focus on identifying and meeting community mobility needs as defined by the community itself and demonstrate how a planning process focused on understanding and responding to community needs can lead to a flexible, adaptable menu of options for the future.

Key strategies highlighted include: utilizing existing communication outlets rather than starting from scratch; creating simple, user-friendly information graphics to communicate quickly and efficiently; combining in-person and online mechanisms to solicit meaningful input and make good use of limited budgets; and tailoring outreach to targeted populations, such as senior citizens.

## LISTENING TO THE ONES WHO KNOW

### Introduction

Douglas County, Georgia is both urban and rural. Like many areas, it is home to a growing population of older adults, but also to young adults and families. While it is home to an increasing number of employers, more than half of the County's working population have jobs outside of the County. It has a strong commuter vanpool program, but for residents who do not own a car or are unable to drive, there are few choices but to walk or ride a bicycle. Recognizing these and other challenges – proximity to downtown Atlanta with almost no way to get there except by car, a relatively high proportion of residents with disabilities, the aging of the Baby Boomer generation, and shifting preferences in terms of how people choose to get around – the Douglas County Board of Commissioners set out to identify a menu of options to improve mobility and accessibility by working directly with, and listening to, the community and its stakeholders. In a departure from traditional approaches to transportation planning, which tend to fixate on infrastructure and transit service, the County sought to identify options based on needs and preferences of people living and working in the County, instead of needs determined by technical experts. Rather than focus exclusively on evaluating the viability of one or two potential transportation services, the study sought to have citizens define current and future transportation needs, and to develop a menu of options that could help meet those needs over time.



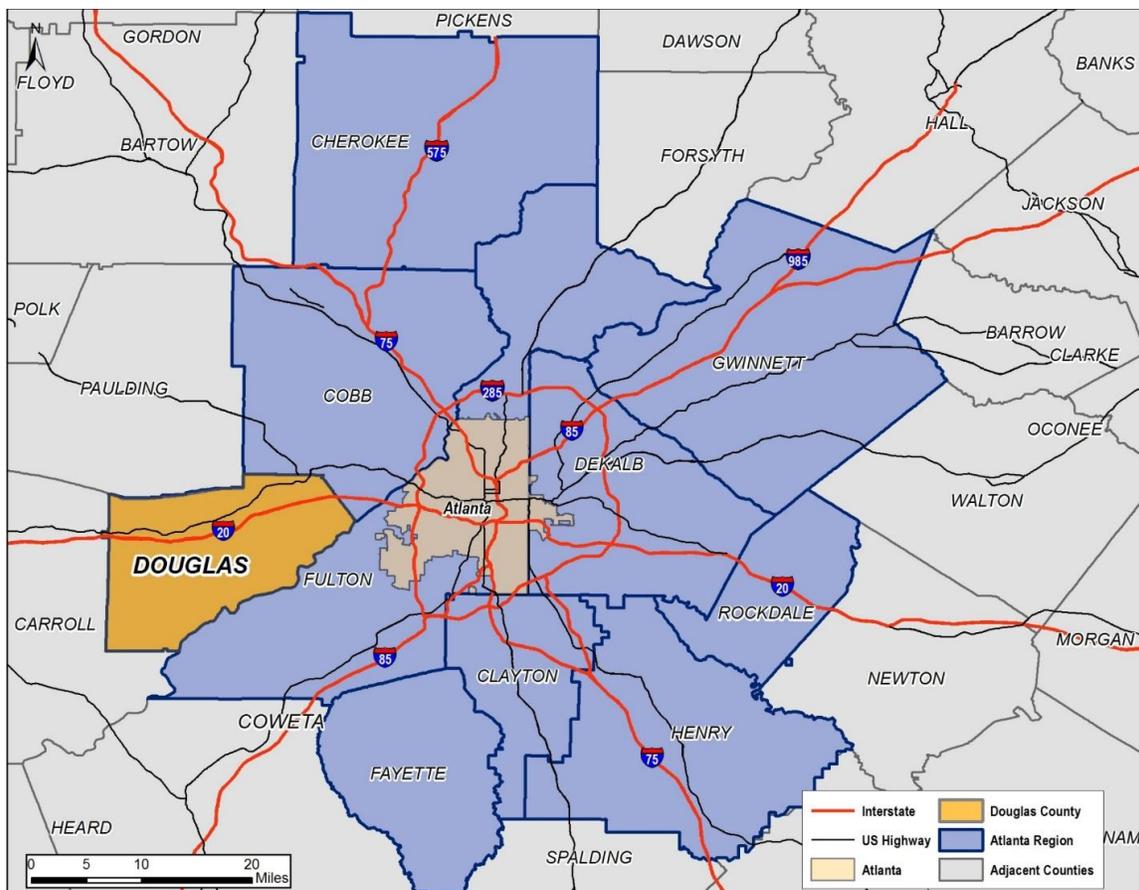
*A study team member talking with residents at a community festival.*

Initially conceived as a transit feasibility study, the Douglas County Transportation Services Study (DCTSS) evolved into a customer-oriented analysis of transportation services and investments aimed at helping County leaders make informed decisions based on current and likely future mobility needs as determined by residents and stakeholders. The desired outcome of the study was for the County to be able, as resources become available, to implement new and expand existing services over time in order to provide residents with choices in how they get around. Rather than focus on building roads and infrastructure, the study was designed to help County leaders and community members think about factors influencing current and future transportation needs and how to target County investments to the most important needs now and in the future. Through a series of engaging activities, residents and other stakeholders were asked to consider how demographic, economic, technological, and social changes would likely impact their mobility needs in the future. The team also asked participants what factors they would like their elected officials to consider when it comes to future transportation options, for their input about how well potential services and options would meet their needs.

This paper and the accompanying presentation describe the creative approach taken by the Douglas County Department of Transportation's Multi-Modal/Rideshare Division to engage residents in developing a menu of transportation service options and lessons learned along the way. They describe a multi-faceted engagement effort, emphasizing strategies for getting meaningful input from a range of people, including some who are often left out of traditional planning processes. The paper first provides an overview of the process followed during the course of the study. It then addresses several strategies and lessons learned: (a) leveraging partnerships and existing communication channels; (b) use of simple, easy-to-understand graphics; (c) the value of combining online and in-person engagement to solicit meaningful input; (d) the importance of engaging community members throughout the life of the study; and (e) designing project outreach activities to be nimble and able to travel to engage people where they already are. Finally, it describes how this broad and varied input and a focus on identifying and meeting mobility needs articulated by the community resulted in a flexible plan with recommendations that can be prioritized and implemented over time to meet evolving community needs.

## Douglas County in Context

To understand the challenges of identifying the needs and preferences of residents and employees of Douglas County, it is important to provide some context and a sense of who, what, and where the County is. Douglas County is located in the western part of the Metro Atlanta region, just 15 miles from Downtown Atlanta. The County covers roughly 200 square miles, most of which is land. Interstate 20 (I-20) bisects the County in its northern half and serves as the primary artery for passenger and freight movement from western Georgia and beyond to and from Metro Atlanta. At the present time, there are only a few travel options other than driving, including a successful commuter vanpool program, serving job locations in Metro Atlanta and eastern Alabama, and express bus services to and from Downtown Atlanta.



*Douglas County in western Metro Atlanta. (Map by Gresham, Smith and Partners, 2016).*

Far from homogenous, Douglas County is a mix of many types – of people, places, and characteristics. The County's population is estimated at 135,000 by the 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Roughly half of residents are white (53%) and 41% are black. Nearly 23% of the population is under the age of 19. The population 65 and older grew by 38% between 2000 and 2010 and continues to grow. Today, ten percent of the population is over age 65. One-fifth of households (20%) earn less than \$25,000 per year, while 18% make more than \$200,000 annually. About two-thirds of the population is in the labor force, while one-third is not. Parts of Douglas County are densely populated, including parts of the City of Douglasville, the County Seat and largest city in the county. Other areas are more spread out, with more rural characteristics. Population density ranges from 200 people per square mile to upwards of 1,800 people per square mile. Three-fourths of the working population commutes more than 45 miles round-trip and 60% of workers have jobs outside of Douglas County. More than 30% of households only have one vehicle and four percent have no vehicle.

All of these people and places have varying needs and it would be difficult, at best, if not downright impossible, to try to meet them all. From the outset of the study, Douglas County officials made it clear that the desired outcome of the study would not be a “silver bullet” – one service that would address all of the transportation needs of County residents. The intent was rather to gain a better, more nuanced understanding of the varying issues and to develop a set of potential options that could meet multiple needs and that would be flexible and adaptable, and that could be implemented over time. Collecting, documenting, and deciphering those needs, from as many perspectives as possible, and helping County officials understand them in a way that would help them make informed decisions was critical. The project team and County staff agreed that in order to maximize participation and tailor recommendations to community needs, it was important to engage community members throughout the course of the project. To that end, the team laid out an outreach strategy that enabled continuous, iterative engagement, testing of potential recommendations, and revisiting assumptions made along the way.

### Process Overview

To maximize the level of active participation by residents and stakeholders in the planning effort, while keeping within the constraints of a somewhat limited budget and timeframe, the project team worked closely with County staff and leaders to increase the “reach” of the project beyond the typical parties that show up at public meetings. A robust public engagement plan was developed, focusing on targeted engagement of key groups and making use of established communication outlets, such as the County’s Communication and Public Relations Department, elected officials, and partner organizations to get the word out. The approach was to provide multiple avenues for people to participate, at a variety of times and locations, in multiple settings.

One of the earliest tasks of the project was to develop a Public and Stakeholder Engagement Plan to guide the engagement activities throughout the project. The plan spelled out the groups and perspectives that would be targeted for outreach, the ways in which information about the project would be communicated, and the types of events and activities that would take place. It also acknowledged the distinction between one-sided information sharing activities that took the form of outreach and informing stakeholders and those that were more interactive and allowed for dialogue and two-way interaction. Preparing the plan was a way for the project team to identify communication outlets and partner groups ahead of time so that more effort could be spent on engagement and other study activities once the project was underway.

The graphic below illustrates the major components of the public and stakeholder engagement element, including the communication mechanisms, the activities conducted, and how input received was shared with County staff and leaders.



The team deliberately scheduled activities at various locations throughout Douglas County and in conjunction with three different community events, giving people opportunities to participate in convenient locations and without necessarily having to attend evening meetings. Event locations included the County Courthouse and Jesse Davis Park in Douglasville, the Dorsett Shoals Baptist Church, and the MILL Amphitheater in Villa Rica. This strategy yielded input from a broader audience than would normally participate in typical public meetings. Through these events, the team was able to engage with residents young and old, people who had lived in Douglas County for a few months, and people who have been here their whole lives (sometimes more than 50 years).

Other components of the public engagement process included a survey to gauge citizens' needs and important factors for County officials to consider; attending town hall meetings organized by County Commissioners; presentations to the Board of Commissioners; a video on the local government cable channel; and interviews with community and service agency leaders. During the early phases of the project, the project team geared activities toward understanding community transportation needs. As the study progressed, the team shifted toward gauging support for potential service options and recommendations it had developed in response to initial community input. The team's final recommendations were vetted by County staff following interviews with community leaders.

### **Communication and Outreach**

Throughout the course of the project, the team made an effort to communicate regularly with the community about the status of the project and work underway. The team used these opportunities to educate people about issues around transportation and facing different groups of people in Douglas County, as well as to ensure residents were aware of opportunities to provide input into the study. By the end of the study, the team had succeeded in engaging more than 1,400 people through a variety of mechanisms; arguably, this project represented one of the most successful outreach efforts conducted in any of Metro Atlanta's outlying, suburban counties.

Electronic communication was the primary form used throughout the course of the project because it is inexpensive and can reach a large number of people in a short amount of time; however, recognizing that not everyone has access to or is able to use the internet, the team also made printed materials and notices available. For example, while the project surveys were conducted mainly online, paper copies were brought to the pop-up events and delivered to senior centers and residences for people to fill out by hand. Team members collected the surveys periodically throughout the course of the project. The County served as the primary communicator, including notices and updates about the project as appropriate in its e-newsletter. Project updates and notification about upcoming activities were also sent directly by the project team to individuals who signed up to receive such information.

The early integration of the County's public information and communications resources, together with its transportation professionals and their resources led to an extraordinarily successful effort to obtain active participation by the County's residents and community stakeholder organizations and private entities. County assets included an electronic database with contact information for over 10,000 residents; two government cable channels; a social media platform; a page on the County's website dedicated to the project; and a weekly electronic newsletter. Utilizing these existing communication channels meant that the project team was able to reach tens of thousands of people from the outset of the study rather than building a database solely from scratch and was able to do so in a shorter amount of time than otherwise would have been possible.

The webpage served as a hub for information and updates about the project. As part of the overall County website, the project page was maintained by the County's Communications and Public Relations staff. The project team would feed information to the communication staff regularly, ensuring that up-to-date information was readily available throughout the life of the study. The page contained information about the project status, meeting notification, documents, resources, and contact information for the project team, making it easy for curious community members to ask questions or provide comments. Having such a website not only made the project more transparent and accessible to the community, but

it meant the project team could focus on tasks other than sending documents to inquiring community members, saving time in the long-run.

***Leveraging established, trusted communication outlets*** was key to raising awareness about the project and reaching a broad audience. The project made use of the electronic newsletters of the Douglas County Chamber of Commerce and of individual County Commissioners in the hopes of reaching an even broader audience and reaching some community members in more than one way. The project team utilized these channels to solicit and encourage direct participation and input into the study, in an attempt to gather input about needs and preferences from people who may not otherwise participate. Incorporating updates and announcements about the project into these broader communication channels enabled the team to engage an audience far beyond the number of people who would attend project events or sign up for updates about a specific project. The Chamber of Commerce agreed to include an announcement about a survey that was being conducted as part of the study and within one day of the distribution, the number of survey responses increased by more than 300.

### **The Value of Simple Graphics**

Successful public engagement and community participation hinges upon meaningful involvement of people who live, work, and play in the communities or neighborhoods being planned. It is important, even essential, some say, to involve people who experience these areas day-in and day-out in decisions about the future of these places. It can be difficult and frustrating, however, for all parties, if decisions are made without regard for fact or a solid understanding of the issues at hand.

Planners strive to help everyday community members make informed decisions, to understand the issues, and to know the facts about places being planned, but this is no easy task. Information about land use, zoning, and transportation is dense and can be convoluted. Planners and engineers are notorious for their use of jargon and acronyms, and for sometimes cramming too much information into presentations, fact sheets, and other handouts. Simple, easy-to-understand graphics can help. In many instances, graphics or pictures can explain succinctly what would take dozens of words to convey.

In an attempt to be more approachable and accessible, the project team working on the DCTSS created a series of information-graphics, or infographics, with facts, statistics, and information about the state of transportation or challenges facing population groups that are present in Douglas County. Each infographic was designed to stand on its own and could be used by the County as part of this or other projects as needed. The infographics address challenges facing people with disabilities and senior citizens, as well the issues around commuting to jobs outside of Douglas County, and the challenges of getting around outside of typical nine-to-five work hours, such as those facing part-time workers, students, and people with multiple jobs. Topics for the infographics were chosen because these groups each represent a substantial proportion of the Douglas County population in one way or another.

The infographics served as tools to inform and educate people about these critical issues. The goal was to help people understand the challenges not only facing customers – for example, someone with disabilities who is no longer able to drive – but also facing the government and agencies trying to provide efficient service(s) to help people live their lives. The purpose was to supply context that could help people provide informed input into the study. An example of one of the infographics is provided on the next page.

Additionally, the team prepared a series of maps illustrating demographic and geographic patterns within Douglas County which were made available to County leaders and the public at large. The team felt it was important not only to include this information in official project documents and reports, but to share it with the people whose input and opinions were being sought. Similar to the infographics, the intent was to provide some context and background information for consideration while thinking about transportation needs and possible solutions.

Using free online tools to create infographics with well-known, easily understood icons and symbols the project team was able to convey a significant amount of information in an engaging and visually

interesting manner. The infographics were handed out at community events and project meetings, posted on the project webpage for anyone to see, and shared with County leaders for their information and use. The data, statistics, and images used in the infographics also proved useful in that they were incorporated into presentations, technical memos, and other project materials that the team distributed to County officials and community members at events to help them understand the challenges facing people with limited transportation options. The infographics were well received by community members, and in particular, by County staff and officials. Distilling complicated facts and figures into simple posters allowed people to hone in on the content without having to sift through paragraphs of text. In fact, the infographics revealed information about Douglas County to elected officials that they had previously not known, such as the number of households without vehicles available.



### Online vs. In-Person Engagement

There is no doubt that the rise of social media has changed the way that people interact, including how planners conduct public involvement. Substantial advances have been made in distributing notifications about upcoming events and tracking public sentiment via social media discussions. Free online tools and platforms abound. In minutes, a planner can draft a quick poll or survey, send it out to a handful of neighborhood stakeholders, and have hundreds of responses. The convenience of writing comments or filling out surveys from the comfort of a home computer is undisputed. Sometimes, though, meaning and nuance of those comments and survey questions or responses can get lost in translation without the

opportunity to clarify or elaborate on comments and questions. That is why it is essential for any effective planning process to incorporate both online and in-person opportunities to participate.

Because the focus of the DCTSS was on understanding (and developing recommendations to address) the needs and preferences of community members, the team set out to facilitate activities that would provide opportunities for more nuanced, meaningful participation, where **community members could provide input in whatever way was most comfortable for them**. We decided early on to largely eschew public meetings. The format is not conducive to authentic engagement, as it leaves little room for discussion between participants, limits the amount of time a community member has to speak, and forces people to express themselves in front of an audience – something that makes many people uncomfortable. On top of that, only a small segment of the population tends to show up for public meetings (1). Rather than public meetings, the team attempted to achieve the goal of allowing community members to provide meaningful input by providing opportunities to participate in multiple ways throughout the course of the project: via email, filling out written questionnaires, online or paper surveys, talking one-on-one with team members, or in small group discussions at meetings.

The project team conducted a community survey to gain an understanding of who uses the existing transportation services available in Douglas County, whether people live and/or work in Douglas County, and to gather input about what people feel are the most important characteristics of good transportation services, and what people would like the County to consider as it examines the need and opportunities for potential future services. This combined online and in-person strategy proved effective, particularly when it came to the project survey. Over the course of a few months, the team received more than 1,100 responses – a surprisingly high number of responses for this type of study in a county of 135,000 people. To achieve this high number of responses, the team distributed paper copies of the survey at project-specific meetings, brought copies to community events attended by project team members, and distributed it via the County and Chamber of Commerce e-newsletters. Paper copies of the survey were also distributed to senior centers and residences. While more than half of responses came from online sources, it was important to make paper copies available in order to reach a broader demographic pool of respondents.

In an effort to be efficient and streamline the response tallying process, the study team brought mobile tablet devices to several community events, offering participants the opportunity to take the survey online using one of the tablets. This proved not to be successful, as most people, when given the choice, opted for the paper version instead. One of the other advantages of having surveys on-hand at community events is that it allowed participants to take it in the present moment, before they were able to forget about it or lose the flyer with the web address on it.

#### Special focus on Senior Citizens

Seniors (generally considered people age 65 and older), who make up roughly ten percent of the County population, were an important focus of the public engagement efforts for this project. The County recognizes that this age cohort will likely grow over the next decade or so, since 25% of the population is between the ages of 45 and 65 and the County wanted to use this project to begin to understand the needs of this constituency, who may become more transportation-dependent in the future, relying more heavily on transportation services. As people live longer, they tend to work later into life, and research by AARP shows that in recent years seniors tend to outlive their ability to drive safely by seven to ten years (2). The Douglas County Senior Services Division indicated that the number one complaint it receives is in regards to the lack of transportation options for seniors.

For these reasons, the project team made a concerted effort to engage senior citizens, caregivers, service providers, and family members. The team did this by attending a popular “senior picnic” hosted by the County’s Senior Services Division, attended by hundreds of seniors, caregivers, and service providers, as well as distributing the project survey directly to the local senior center and senior residential communities. The team set up a table at the event to distribute information about the study and handed out copies of the survey to attendees on their way in. A mapping activity also helped team members try

to understand the places seniors desire to go to and from – where they would likely need or want transportation services.

### **Nimble, Mobile Projects: Go to Where the People Are**

Busy schedules and short attention spans mean that projects, and planners, must increasingly be mobile. Technology, long commutes, and full schedules are always competing for our attention, often leaving little time for leisure activities. People grapple with finding time to feed themselves and their families, let alone making time to attend public planning meetings. As a result, planners must compete for the attention of communities and make participating in planning processes easy, convenient, and worthwhile. One strategy for making it easy for people to participate is to take projects to where the people are. Setting up tables, booths, or information stations at popular community events not only raises the visibility of a project, but also means that **people can participate without going out of their way**.



*A study team member talking with a resident at a community festival on a summer weekend.*

For this study, the project team attempted to make it convenient to participate by offering multiple ways to provide input and tagging onto other activities already going on in the community. The team selected relatively high-profile community events that attract a wide array of attendees, including families with children. The events selected were intentionally spread out across the county in order to make it easier for people in all parts of the county to be involved. Two of the three events took place on weekends, in the hopes of engaging people who may not otherwise take time or be able to participate.

Another strategy for increasing participation without requiring community members to attend separate meetings is to incorporate presentations and activities into other scheduled meetings, such as those of

neighborhood or community groups, or elected officials. Doing so provides exposure for a project, but also opportunities to gather input from people who are involved in their communities. The Douglas County Transportation Services Study team arranged for presentations at Town Hall meetings held by County Commissioners in their respective districts, each attended by more than twenty people. Presenting at these meetings helped reinforce the project team's understanding of issues and needs of geographically diverse areas of the County and by going to meetings already scheduled to take place, made it more convenient for people to participate in the process without burdening their already busy schedules.

### **An Iterative Process: Adapting and Responding to Community Input**

One of the keys to the ultimate success of the study was the team's ability **to listen, respond, and adapt to shifting needs and priorities**. As an example, during one of the first service agency meetings, the Director of Senior Services raised the importance of transportation services to the division and the senior community, pointing out that lack of transportation was the number one complaint received by the Division. While this had been an important perspective and component of the study until that point, it quickly became clear that meeting seniors' needs would be a priority of the study going forward.

This strategy, in part, resulted from the project team providing **multiple opportunities for community input throughout the course of the study**, not just at one point in time. The first phase of the project, beginning with kick-off meetings and the community survey, focused on identifying community needs and transportation issues. The project team asked questions about how people get around, where they tend to go, and what issues they have with transportation in the County in general. Having identified the main issues and concerns, the team shifted focus to try to get input about potential transportation service

options and community support for those options. The team asked questions about the level of support for potential options and the degree to which community members felt certain services would meet their transportation needs. Over time, it became clear that some options were better suited to meeting community needs than others. For example, it was determined that there was little to no interest in car-sharing programs and that, despite some interest from community members, an airport shuttle was not in the best interest of the County at the time. As these preferences and priorities became known, the team adapted; car-sharing and airport shuttles were removed from the list of potential service options.

In another example, the team learned throughout the course of the study that a substantial proportion of County residents were not aware of existing transportation services. During outreach events time and again, people were surprised to learn that Douglas County operated a commuter vanpool program or that express bus service to and from Atlanta was available. In fact, 79% of the respondents to the study's survey said they had never used any of the transportation services available in Douglas County, including the vanpool, voucher program for seniors and people with disabilities, or the express buses. In response to this phenomenon, the team, in consultation with County leaders, added marketing and promotion to the potential recommendations to improve service in the hopes of boosting use of existing services. In the end, marketing and promotion of existing services emerged as one of the most preferred potential options from the community's perspective.

Through the study's engagement activities, it also became clear that pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be considered among potential transportation improvements, alongside new or improved services such as shuttles. As one resident put it, there is no point in a shuttle service if people have no way to get from their homes to the shuttle pick-up location. Other critical input that came through as a result of the multi-pronged engagement efforts included:

- specific locations where transportation services may be needed in the future;
- the importance of making fiscally sound investments and the financial impact on the County of any future services;
- ensuring that, whatever services are offered or investments are made, safety is a priority;
- the need for transportation service for senior citizens that is more reflective of day-to-day needs and does not require reservations to be made days in advance;
- a desire to provide options for people to travel around at times other than rush-hour, including mid-day, evenings, and possibly weekends; and
- the need to consider the role of transportation services in reducing congestion and connecting people to other services available throughout the region.

## **Conclusion**

The County's willingness to listen and to adapt are hallmarks of this study. It is a different approach than many traditional transportation studies. The process of discovering or teasing out recommendations through listening and responding to community needs rather than evaluating forgone conclusions will go a long way toward improving transportation planning and making solutions more meaningful and useful for the communities they serve. Oftentimes in transportation planning, an alternative is identified and a team of experts is tasked with backing into it - conducting analysis of why it will or will not be a viable option. That process may still make sense in some instances for some communities, but there is value in a process that considers mobility needs first, and that does not fixate solely on infrastructure or transit but looks holistically at transportation, including less-traditional ways of improving mobility.

Throughout the process of listening, responding, and adapting to input from people who live, work, and play in Douglas County, the project team learned several lessons that are applicable to other planning processes. Based on the experience of the study team, the following are recommended strategies to help planners get more out of their efforts to listen to the community and to help ensure meaningful input from a range of people:

1. Tap into existing, trusted communication channels to help spread the word about your project and reach a broader audience than if starting with a blank slate. Local government agencies, project sponsors, elected officials, and community organizations are good places to start.
2. Despite its conveniences for project leaders and participants, do not substitute online engagement for in-person interaction. Truly understanding community needs, preferences, and priorities requires multiple forms of input that allow for conversation and clarification. Engaging a broad spectrum of the community population means providing multiple opportunities to participate in ways that people are comfortable with and that are convenient.
3. Make it easy for people to participate by taking the project to them. People are busy and tend not to have or make time for planning project meetings unless they are compelled in a strong way. Traditional public meetings are generally not welcoming and not conducive to gathering meaningful input. Instead, attend community events and organized meetings to make it easy and convenient for people to get involved. This can help projects reach bigger, broader audiences and get a wider range of input.
4. Tailor outreach to targeted population groups, such as senior citizens, and provide multiple opportunities to participate throughout the course of a project. It is difficult to gauge needs and priorities based upon a single set of input or interaction with community members. Furthermore, input is often more meaningful when people are responding to a set of potential options. At the same time, if the first opportunity to provide input is when options are being presented, it may appear as if decisions about outcomes and recommendations have already been made.
5. Engage community members at key milestones throughout the course of a study, not just at the outset or the end. It may be tempting to host a large and visible kickoff meeting and an open-house to get input on a draft plan; however, meaningful engagement of the “ones who know” is important throughout the course of a study and can provide valuable input that may shape and strengthen recommendations and outcomes. For the DCTSS, the project team first sought input to understand the critical issues people face and issues they experience day in and day out. Then, having developed draft or initial recommendations, the team sought input on and reactions to those recommendations. The team refined the recommendations based on reactions to those initial ideas, and developed a final plan that better reflected feedback from the community.

In summary, without meaningful engagement of Douglas County citizens through multiple mechanisms and across geographic areas, incomes, household demographics, and ages, the study would have been much less successful. Without the ability of the project team to understand and measure the actual levels of public support for proposed investments in transportation services, arriving at consensus on the plan's recommendations would have been much more difficult. While simple in concept, “listening to those who know”, the citizens living, working, traveling in, and encountering mobility barriers was the central success factor for examining how transportation services should best be improved to meet the public's mobility needs.

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