

Fort Bend County Public Transportation Department

Public Participation Plan *A Citizen's Guide for Public Involvement In the Transportation Planning Process*



APPROVED BY FORT BEND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

September 24, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

The Fort Bend County Public Transportation Department (FBCPT) was formed in June 2005 and is governed by the Fort Bend County Commissioners Court. In 2021, FBCPT rebranded itself to Fort Bend Transit (FBT). FBT offers general public commuter and demand response service to the citizens of Fort Bend County. FBT understands that providing ample opportunities for the public to participate in decision making is essential to delivering transportation solutions that meet the needs of the citizens of Fort Bend County.

Fort Bend Transit is committed to providing an open and visible decision-making process and ensuring equal access for its citizens. FBT shall actively solicit the involvement of citizens in the public decision-making process, through public notification, media exposure, community outreach, community presentations, public meetings, and public hearings.

This document describes outreach strategies and procedures to ensure a proactive community outreach program. FBT staff will apply the principles and guidance set out in this document to guide its efforts to create public involvement opportunities to ensure thorough public participation in the decision-making process using the regulations and guidance provided in Federal and State law.

PURPOSE

The Public Participation Plan (PPP) is a guide for FBT's ongoing public participation activities. The purpose of this PPP is to provide guidance when seeking public input related to projects and service changes and to identify techniques and methodologies for soliciting and considering public input.

The PPP aims to offer early and continuous opportunities for the public to be involved in the decision-making process and to consider the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts of proposed transportation decisions. It is intended as a guide on how FBT will sustain its efforts to engage community members throughout the service area. As established with our Title VI policy, this includes seeking out and considering the viewpoints of minority, low-income, and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations as well as older adults and persons with limited mobility in the course of conducting outreach activities.

The PPP is intended to evolve to meet the changing needs of the community. FBT may periodically review and revise these methods to incorporate new and innovative ways to involve the public in transportation decision-making processes.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Fort Bend Transit's office is located in Rosenberg, Texas.

Deliveries and/or correspondence are received at:

Mailing Address:

Fort Bend County

Public Transportation Department

301 Jackson Street

Richmond, Texas 77469

Physical Address:

3737 Bamore Road

Rosenberg, Texas 77471

The following telephone numbers can be used to contact Departmental staff, schedule a ride, obtain information about services, and/or provide comments concerning services:

Toll Free: 866-751-TRIP (8747)

Office Number: 281-633-RIDE (7433)

Fax Number: 832-471-1843

Comments, questions, or concerns should be directed to the following address:

Transit@fortbendcountytexas.gov.

Information regarding our services is available on the Fort Bend County website at www.FBCTransit.org.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

FBT is committed to a thorough and robust public participation process which employs best practices and complies with Federal and State law, regulations, and guidance on public participation. All comments and concerns will be considered.

The goals of the plan are to:

1. Offer a variety of opportunities for the general public to engage in transit planning and decision-making activities.
2. Maintain traditional public notice practices established by State and Local statutes.
3. Consider public input received from regional processes carried out by other entities.

The objectives of the plan are to:

1. Provide general notification of meetings and forums for public input in a manner that is understandable to all populations including but not limited to low-income, minority, or LEP populations.

2. Include meeting materials in a manner that is understandable to all populations including but not limited to low-income, minority, or LEP populations.
3. Utilize a variety of communication methods to capture public input from populations which are not likely to attend or engage in public meetings.
4. Utilize a variety of communication methods to provide notice to the public, including new, innovative, or non-traditional means of notification.
5. Schedule meetings at times and locations that are convenient, accessible, and welcoming to all area citizens, including but not limited to low-income, minority, or LEP communities.
6. Hold meetings in locations near planned projects to ensure those most likely to be impacted have opportunities for input.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

Major Service and Fare Changes

Fort Bend Transit defines a major service change as a 25 percent reduction or increase of service hours of routes currently in operation and funded by the Federal Transit Administration. A fare change occurs if the amount of fares increases or decreases.

At a minimum, FBT will advertise a notice of public comment in the newspaper of record for Fort Bend County. An opportunity to submit comments on proposed fare increases or major service changes will be provided with a comment period of at least 30 calendar days from the date the advertisement is published. The notice will include a description of the proposed changes, information on how to submit comments along with the office contact information.

A public meeting is not mandatory; however, an opportunity for a public meeting in order to solicit comment will be provided upon written request. The written request must be received within the 30 calendar day comment period. If a public meeting is requested, a notice of public meeting will be posted in the newspaper of record for Fort Bend County at least one week prior to the meeting. The notice will include the time, date, and location of the public meeting.

Comments received will be compiled and considered prior to finalizing recommendations and final changes will be made available to the public. If changes to the proposed schedule are made based on the results of the public comment, the changes will be drafted and announced by public notice. If no changes are made as a result of the public comment and/or public meeting, the proposed changes will be considered final.

Federal, State, County, and Local Funding

Prior to 2014, recipients were able to rely on the TIP development process and public outreach of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to satisfy the individual and/or joint responsibilities for public participation. This related to the development of program of projects under Section 5307 and other formula programs which have the same statutory grant requirements (5310, 5339, etc.). The requirements have since changed, as stated in FTA Circular 9030.1E, and as a recipient of federal funds, FBT is required to request public comment on the funding allocated.

At a minimum, FBT will advertise a notice of public comment in the newspaper of record for Fort Bend County. An opportunity to submit comments on Federal and State funding will be provided with a comment period of at least 14 calendar days from the date the advertisement is published. The notice will include a description of the project(s), project cost, Federal, State or Local share, information on how to submit comments along with the office contact information.

A public hearing is not mandatory; however, an opportunity for a public hearing in order to solicit comment will be provided upon written request. The written request must be received within the 14 calendar day comment period. If a public hearing is requested, a notice of public hearing will be posted in the newspaper of record for Fort Bend County at least one week prior to the meeting. The notice will include the time, date, and location of the public meeting.

As a sub-recipient of federal funding from Houston METRO, FBT projects are included during METRO's public input process. FBT also places all funding acceptance or budgetary amendments on Fort Bend County Commissioner's Court for action by the Court. Commissioner's Court meeting notices and agendas are advertised in the County's newspaper of record and on the county website. Each Commissioner's Court meeting provides an opportunity for public comment.

Fort Bend Transit participates in the County's annual process for approving departmental budgets. FBT's budget includes revenues from Federal, State, and Local funding sources which are listed in the County Budget document. A budget hearing is provided for the purposes of receiving comments. The time, date, and location of the hearing will be published in the county newspaper of record.

Comments received will be compiled and considered prior to finalizing funds and/or budgets. Final changes will be made available to the public. If no changes are made as a result of the public comment and/or public hearing, the proposed funds and/or budgets will be considered final.

Capital Purchases and Improvements

Capital purchases such as buses, furniture, and equipment are included in the Federal, State, County, and Local funding budgets. Comments regarding these purchases will be received as part of the public comment for Federal, State, County, and Local funding.

New Capital Improvements such as facilities, terminals, park and ride sites, and maintenance and administration buildings are also included in the Federal, State, and County, and Local funding budgets. Comments regarding these purchases will be received as part of the public comment for Federal, State, County, and Local funding. In addition, at least one Public Meeting will be held for the purposes of receiving public comments on proposed capital improvements.

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)

Fort Bend Transit has established a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program in accordance with regulations of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), 49 CFR Part 26. The County has received Federal financial assistance from the Department of Transportation, and as a condition of receiving this assistance, the County has signed an assurance that it will comply with 49 CFR Part 26. In complying with 49 CFR Part 26, FBT must establish an overall three-year goal and provide for public participation.

FBT will consult with minorities, women's and general contractor groups, community organizations, and other officials or organizations in an effort to gather information concerning DBE's. This information would include the availability of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged businesses, the effects of discrimination on opportunities for DBEs, and a grantee's efforts to establish a level playing field for the participation of DBEs.

FBT will, at a minimum, advertise a notice of public comment announcing the proposed overall three-year goal in the newspaper of record for Fort Bend County. The County may also utilize general circulation media and available minority-focus media and trade publications, and websites. The public notice shall include the proposed goal and its rationale. An opportunity to submit comments will be provided with a comment period of at least 30 calendar days from the date the advertisement is published. The notice will include a brief description of the goal and rationale, how to submit comments, along with office contact information. The goal and the rationale will also be made available for inspection during normal business hours at the FBT offices for a period of at least 30 calendar days following the date of the notice.

Once FBT has completed the public participation process the goal and its rationale are submitted to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for final approval. FBT will begin using the overall goal on October 1st of each year, unless FTA has issued other instructions. If FBT establishes a project goal, it will begin using this goal by the time of the first solicitation for a FTA-assisted project contract. FBT will post the goal and its rationale on its website where it will remain throughout the three (3) year term.

Emergency, Temporary, and/or Administrative Actions

Fort Bend Transit will provide public notice of changes by advertising on the county website and placing notices in buses for service changes due to emergency conditions, road or other construction concerns, and/or other temporary situations, when possible. Other strategies such as email or direct mail to stakeholders might also be utilized.

FBT participates in the County's development of Emergency Operations and Evacuation Planning overseen by Fort Bend County's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). The OEM follows Federal, State, and Local guidelines for this process. In emergency situations, public notice falls under the responsibility of local governments. The public should monitor television, radio, and other primary media outlets for direction.

Public Participation Plan

At a minimum, FBT will advertise a notice of public comment in the newspaper of record for Fort Bend County for initial adoption of the Public Participation Plan (PPP). An opportunity to submit comments on will be provided with a comment period of at least 30 calendar days from the date the advertisement is published. The notice will include a description of the information on how to submit comments along with the office contact information. Comments received will be compiled and considered prior to finalizing the plan. Final changes will be made available to the public. If no changes are made as a result of the public comment, the proposed plan will be considered final. Once the PPP is adopted, any changes shall also include a 30 calendar day comment period.

FBT also refers to the Transportation Advisory Committee, consisting of community stakeholders, to garner input on operational policies affecting passenger services. Policies are developed with the input of the committee but not formalized or implemented until public comment is received. Input from the committee is sought for the initial creation of policies and/or procedures as well as changes to policies such as the Passenger Guidelines and other policy documents or concerns in which the direct provision of transportation service is affected.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION METHODS

Public Notice

At a minimum, a notice of public comment will be placed in the official newspaper of record for Fort Bend County. FBT may also choose to use one or more of the following methods:

1. Advertise notices on county website.
2. Distribute electronic and/or physical copies of notices for public input.
3. Advertise on FBT's social media platforms.
4. Advertise notices on buses and/or at regular bus stops.
5. Advertise notices to appropriate local Hispanic, African-American, and Asian publication, and local newspapers advertising public meetings and requests for comments.
6. Advertise notices on websites of other public or private agencies.
7. Advertise notices on signs or billboards (electronic and traditional messaging signs, boards or other displays).
8. Place notices in public areas, community agency locations, on area bulletin boards, or in area private and public buildings as allowed.
9. Advertise notices on the radio, television, magazine or other advertising media outlets.
10. Email notices to agencies and stakeholders in the community such as elected officials, state legislators, environmental organizations, resident groups, civic organizations, and businesses with interest in a project or who represent the public population of riders.
11. Broadcast public service announcements.

Public Meetings

Public Meetings are an informal public input process open to the public and informational in content. Public meetings are generally held near planned facility locations, at activity or community centers, or during other community events.

Attendees will have the opportunity to provide comment directly to the conducting body, leave written comments, or are directed to a website designed to gather comments. Detailed information, graphics, story boards, and/or presentations are used to provide background information on the item being proposed.

Public Hearings

Public hearings are a formal public input process open to the public. These hearings are recorded live and transcripts or minutes are made available to the public in a timely fashion. Public Hearings are generally held near planned facility locations, at activity or community centers, or during other community events.

Attendees will have the opportunity to provide comments or submit them in writing during the public hearing. Commenters are generally limited to a 3-minute presentation and no feedback is allowed from the conducting body during the public hearing process.

At the beginning of each regularly scheduled Fort Bend County Commissioner's Court, an opportunity for public input is provided on any and all agenda items. FBT accepts all comments received on Departmental actions undertaken by the Commissioner's Court as part of its regularly scheduled meeting agenda.

Participation in Public Participation Programs of other Agencies

As a recipient and sub-recipient of federal funding, FBT's Program of Projects (POP) is included within the Houston Galveston Area Council's (H-GAC's) Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Their public notification provides opportunities for public meetings with a comment period of not less than 30 days. Additional opportunities for public review are provided informally throughout the TIP development process. As a sub-recipient of federal funding from Houston METRO, FBT's projects related to these funds are included in METRO's public input processes.

FBT often partners with other local governments and organizations. These entities provide their own programs and offer interested parties' opportunities to address concerns and receive comments.

Any comments obtained through any of the above-listed processes will be considered.

Other

FBT may also participate in public input processes hosted by other entities either by providing funding or locations, additional advertising or promotions, materials, and/or by attending these events to provide additional information or to receive or address

comments related to its projects.

FBT may also use additional outreach methods not specifically listed such as social media notices, text messaging, bulk mailers, etc.

TRANSLATION AND SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

FBT will hold all community meetings or public hearings in locations easily accessible to the public. Reasonable accommodations will be provided for persons attending meetings or functions. Requests from persons needing special accommodations should be received three (3) business days prior to a function.

Public meetings, hearings, etc. will be conducted in English. Requests for language interpreters or other special communication needs should be made at least three (3) business days prior to a function.

Vital documents will be translated in languages that meet the Limited English Proficient (LEP) Safe Harbor threshold and will be available to the public. For requests for translations in a language not identified under the Safe Harbor threshold, please contact the Transit Office during business hours and allow three (3) to five (5) days to process the request.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Fort Bend Transit welcomes your comments and complaints. We are committed to using passenger feedback as a tool to improve our quality of service. If you experience any dissatisfaction with the service and wish to file a complaint, you can call our office and our staff will take a verbal complaint.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity and access for persons with disabilities. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs & activities receiving federal financial assistance (42 U.S.C. Section 2000d).

Fort Bend County is committed to ensure nondiscriminatory transportation in support of our mission to provide high quality transit services for all Americans. We are committed to taking affirmative action to assure that no person shall be excluded with regard to the routing, scheduling, or quality of service of transportation service on the grounds of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, or other protected status. If you believe you have been subjected to discrimination, you may file a complaint with the Fort Bend Transit Civil Rights Officer by calling Fort Bend Transit at 281-633-RIDE or by sending a written complaint to:

Fort Bend Transit
ATTN: Civil Rights Officer
301 Jackson Street
Richmond, Texas 77469

Or via email at: transit@fortbendcountytexas.gov

Complaints may also be filed with the following organization no later than 180 days after the date of the alleged discrimination:

Federal Transit Administration's Office of Civil Rights
ATTN: Title VI Program Coordinator
East Building, 5th Floor – TCR
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590