BETTER [BUS] STOPS

Better Bus Stops Community Engagement Report

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Glossary

ACP50s stands for Areas of Concentrated Poverty where more than 50 percent of residents are people of color. Developed by the Metropolitan Council, the mapping of ACP50s is used to better understand racial and economic disparities in the Twin Cities region. The Metropolitan Council defines Areas of Concentrated Poverty (ACPs) as census tracts where 40 percent or more of the residents have family or individual incomes that are less than 185 percent of the federal poverty threshold. Some census tracts that meet this poverty threshold have a large share of college or graduate students; these census tracts are excluded from the defined Areas of Concentrated Poverty. To identify areas where people of color experience the most exposure to concentrated poverty, the Council further differentiates Areas of Concentrated Poverty where 50 percent or more of the residents are people of color (ACP50s).

Better Bus Stops is a program to invest in bus stops and shelter improvements that enhance access to employment and educational opportunities.

Capital improvement is a project to invest in a facility, including new construction, renovation or replacement. Capital improvements at bus stops may include a new shelter, replacement of an existing shelter, upgrading a shelter with lighting or a heater and making associated electrical connections, or improving sidewalks or other concrete work.

Community engagement is the act of intentionally organizing individuals, communities, constituencies and organizations to help the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit generate ideas, better understand issues, identify concerns and considerations, and help with problem-solving. Community-centered engagement involves developing long-lasting relationships with transit riders, people of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities and other historically marginalized groups so they can participate in decision-making at their fullest potential; understanding that decisions affecting people are best made with people instead of for people. Key elements of community engagement include greater transparency, capacity-building opportunities and more equitable outcomes.

Corridors of Opportunity was an initiative focused on accelerating the development of the region's transit system and providing opportunities for development to connect people of all incomes and backgrounds to jobs, housing choices, recreation and services. Funded by the Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Communities Grant and Living Cities collaboration, this initiative was implemented in 2011-2013. The Better Bus Stops community engagement model built off the successes of Corridors of Opportunity, including the aspects of funding a cohort of community organizations to participate in Metro Transit's community engagement work and giving the funding decision-making to community organizations.

Community Engagement Team (CET) is comprised of Nexus Community Partners, the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability (now named The Alliance), and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota (previously the Center for Neighborhood Organizing). The CET was formed in 2010 to create a process for engaging and involving underrepresented communities in all aspects of planning, decision-making and implementation along the Twin Cities region's proposed transit-way corridors. The CET's work is focused on supporting low-wealth populations, indigenous communities, communities of color, new immigrants and people with disabilities.

Ladders of Opportunity is a grant program of the Federal Transit Administration, designed to invest in projects that improve the mobility of Americans with transportation disadvantages and allow them a better chance of climbing Ladders of Opportunity towards economic self-determination. Metro Transit applied for the grant in 2014 to help fund Better Bus Stops.

Metropolitan Council is the regional policy-making body, planning agency and provider of essential services for the Twin Cities metropolitan region.

Metro Transit is the largest transit provider in the Twin Cities region of Minnesota and operated by the Metropolitan Council.

Public Engagement Plan (PEP) is a Metropolitan Council framework that establishes principles and processes for public engagement to ground Council decisions in the needs of community stakeholders and to engage people in the decision-making process. It was collaboratively created with the Community Engagement Steering Committee, a committee formed from the Corridors of Opportunity project with representatives from organizations previously granted to conduct engagement work within a Metropolitan Council project or initiative. This framework guided the Better Bus Stops community engagement strategy.

Shelters are aluminum and glass structures placed as some bus stops to provide transit customers weather protection, detailed schedules, seating, and sometimes lighting and radiant heaters. Shelters are also called customer waiting shelters, transit shelters or bus shelters.

Thrive MSP 2040 is the Metropolitan Council's long-range policy plan for the Twin Cities region. It reflects our concerns and aspirations, anticipates future needs in the region, and addresses our responsibility to future generations.

Executive Summary

What is Better Bus Stops?

Better Bus Stops is a project to enhance access to opportunities by investing in bus stops. Better Bus Stops is both a capital project – to make investments in shelters, shelter lighting, heaters and pedestrian access – and a significant community engagement process. The project focuses on neighborhoods that contain areas of concentrated poverty where more than half of the residents are people of color.

In its commitment to use community feedback to inform future bus stop investment decisions, Metro Transit initiated an active year of community engagement work, from March 2016 through March 2017. This document reports the process and results of the community engagement.

What was the community engagement model?

The community engagement goals were to engage with traditionally underrepresented communities, to increase transparency about bus stop and shelter investments, and to engage community to learn about bus stop improvement priorities.

Metro Transit joined in a partnership with the Community Engagement Team, comprised of Nexus Community Partners, the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. The CET awarded $229,000 in contracts to 11 local organizations to engage transit riders and historically underrepresented communities around transit equity issues with a focus on bus stops. Metro Transit staff, the CET and subcontracted organizations formed a cohort to build relationships, share information and interpret the feedback received across 22 neighborhoods.

The community engagement process was focused on essential questions about:

- Priority locations for shelters
- The importance of different shelter and bus stop features such as lighting
- Locations of potentially historically significant places in the communities where investments are planned
- Design of shelters and bus stop features
- Issues that affect regional transit equity

In addition to the focused efforts with the CET, Metro Transit staff conducted its own community outreach and engagement to hear from the broader transit service area on the essential questions.

What was learned from the community?

Community-identified priority locations for shelters are where many people wait for the bus, for people who may especially need transit shelters with consideration to their age, ability or health, and for people who rely on transit.

Community-identified priority bus stop features are signage and information, benches, shelters, lighting and heaters.

A safe environment at the bus stop, bus stops and shelters designed for all ages and abilities, and shelters designed for better weather protection are community priorities.

The community organization cohort identified 25 historically and culturally significant buildings and places in their neighborhoods.

Community feedback addressed all aspects of the transit experience, not just information about bus stops, including the broad themes of bus service and operations, equitable distribution of resources, fares, and safety. This feedback outside of the Better Bus Stops essential questions was provided to the appropriate departments within Metro Transit that deal with those issues.
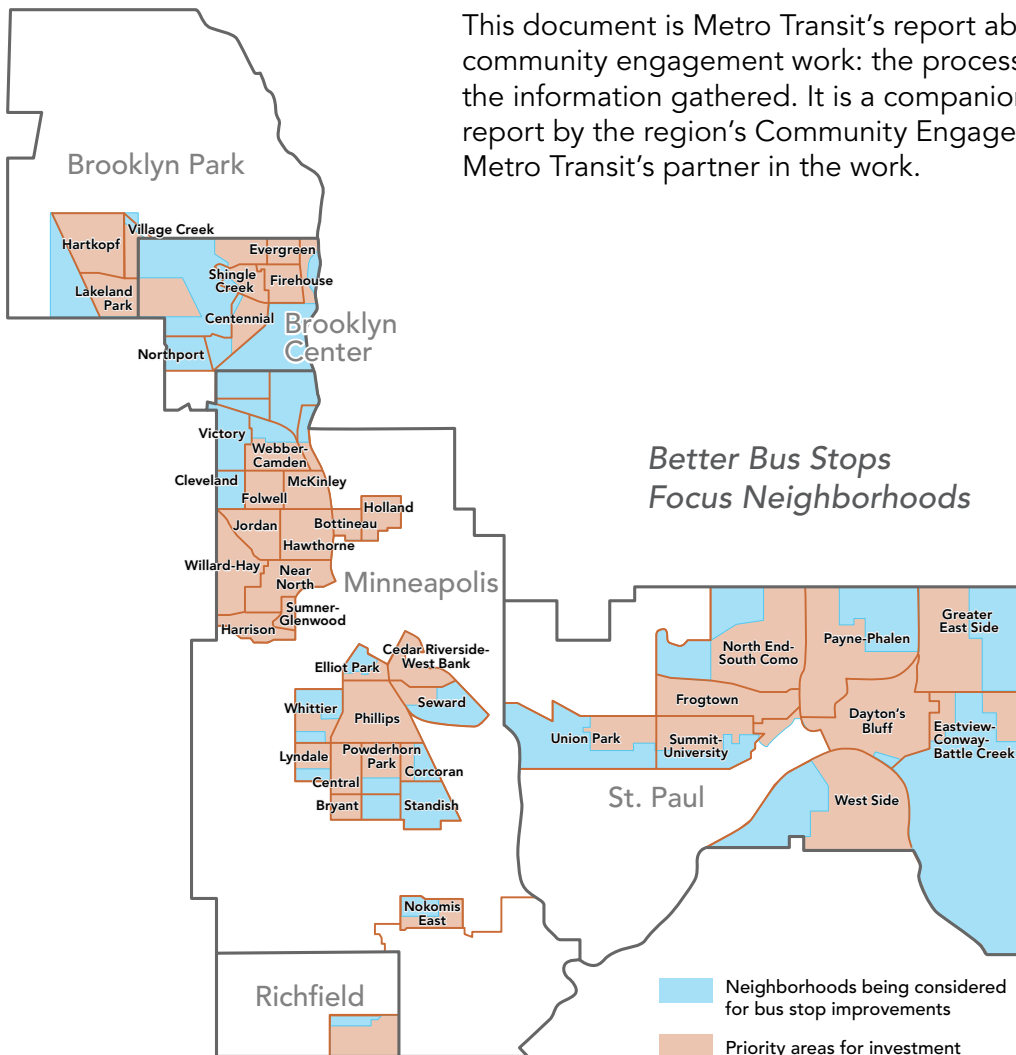
Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

Better Bus Stops community engagement was successful in reaching its goals:

- Leaders from traditionally underrepresented communities participated as subcontractors to engage people from their communities. They were instrumental in getting survey participation that demographically represents that of transit riders' as a whole in terms of race and ethnicity, income, age, ability and gender.

- In total from all Better Bus Stops community engagement strategies, an estimated 7,000 people participated and approximately 185 community engagement events were held.

- Increased transparency about bus stop and shelter investments was achieved through Metro Transit staff preparing and sharing technical information in collaboration with subcontractors, and then making it available to the general public.

- By engaging community to learn about bus stop improvement priorities, Metro Transit now has information that will help it to update its guidelines for shelter placement. In addition, the legacy of Better Bus Stops community engagement will include Metro Transit departments applying this feedback to their work, continued relationships among the cohort participants, and a strengthened community engagement practice within Metro Transit.

Introduction

Better Bus Stops is a program to enhance access to opportunities by investing in bus stops. Better Bus Stops is both a capital project – to make investments in shelters, shelter lighting, heaters and pedestrian access – and a significant community engagement process. Better Bus Stops is a program of Metro Transit, the largest transit provider in the Twin Cities region of Minnesota, and is made possible by the Federal Transit Administration Ladders of Opportunity grant, the State of Minnesota and local funding.

The Better Bus Stops program focused on areas defined by the Metropolitan Council as areas of concentrated poverty where more than half of the residents are people of color (ACP50), identified from analyses of 2010 Census data. To use a project area that would have boundaries familiar to communities, and to take an asset-based approach, the Better Bus Stops areas are the recognized neighborhood boundaries which contain the ACP50s. This included 28 Minneapolis neighborhoods within North, Northeast and South Minneapolis, nine total St. Paul neighborhoods on the East and West Sides and Frogtown, North End, Summit-University, Union Park, and portions of Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park and Richfield.

This document is Metro Transit's report about the community engagement work: the process used and the information gathered. It is a companion to the report by the region's Community Engagement Team, Metro Transit's partner in the work.

Better Bus Stops Focus Neighborhoods

Legend:
- Neighborhoods being considered for bus stop improvements
- Priority areas for investment

Capital Project

The goal of the capital project is to add transit shelters at up to 150 bus stops, improve up to 75 existing shelters and improve pedestrian access at bus stops in the Better Bus Stops neighborhoods. The capital project began in late 2014 and is anticipated to conclude in 2018. Progress on bus stop investments can be viewed at metrotransit.org/better-bus-stops.

The capital improvements at bus stops occurred simultaneously with the community engagement process for two reasons. One, to meet the timeline for receiving and spending the federal grant money, Metro Transit advanced the capital project using the standing practices for making investment decisions. Secondly, Metro Transit needs to prioritize bus stops for improvements consistently across its transit service area using a process that is replicable year after year. Having community inform guidelines for making future decisions has a longer lasting impact than involving community in a one-time process to help with selecting bus stops for improvements.

Community Engagement

To engage with communities about issues of transit equity and bus stop conditions, Metro Transit joined in a partnership with the region's Community Engagement Team (CET), comprised of Nexus Community Partners, the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

The CET was originally formed to identify, develop and support targeted strategies that engage underrepresented communities in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes on and around transit-oriented corridors. The CET's work is focused on supporting low-wealth populations, communities of color, new immigrants, people with disabilities and other cultural constituencies. Under contract with Metro Transit, the CET subcontracted with 11 local community organizations, funding them to engage with their neighborhoods and communities over the course of a year starting in the spring of 2016.

As experts in community engagement with their constituents, the organizations engaged transit riders and historically underrepresented communities – with a goal of influencing the decision-making process behind bus stop improvements. This approach was chosen to ensure historically underrepresented communities were heard, while also gathering community feedback from around the region through more traditional community engagement methods.

AUDIENCES FOR THIS REPORT

This report details the process and information learned through the Better Bus Stops community engagement work. It is written with the following audiences and their potential interests in mind:

- Metro Transit leadership, to document the work to date and inform future decisions

- Metro Transit staff, to learn about the opportunities and benefits of the community engagement results that relate to their work

- Federal Transit Administration, to illustrate results of the Ladders of Opportunity grant funds spent on community engagement

- Public agencies, to consider undertaking a similar community engagement model

- The general public, transit customers and people who participated in Better Bus Stops, to understand community engagement and its results at Metro Transit

- Better Bus Stops cohort of community organizations who did the work, to show communities how their feedback was documented

- Other community organizations, to consider undertaking a similar community engagement model

- Foundations and funders, to consider funding government/community partnerships

Community Engagement Model

Timeline

In 2014 Metro Transit began to change how it addressed a persistent issue: bus stops with poor waiting environments in a transit system with more than 12,000 bus stops.

> *"As many different improvements as we have made in our transit service, we really have neglected our front porch. And our front porch to our customers is the bus stop. That's where we present ourselves to our customers really for the first time." –Brian Lamb, Metro Transit General Manager (Star Tribune, Oct. 14, 2015)*

Planning for a new light-rail line with high amenity stations led community organizers and transit riders to ask, "what about the bus stops?" and highlight potential inequities in Metro Transit's capital investments. In response, Metro Transit committed to improve its bus stops and update its shelter placement policies.

The critique about equity caught the attention of agency leaders because a cultural shift was happening around equity and community engagement at the Metropolitan Council, the region's planning organization and the organization that operates Metro Transit. Equity is a major focus of the region's policy plan, Thrive MSP 2040, which was adopted in May 2014.

To help address equity concerns, Metro Transit applied for and received a $3.26 million Ladders of Opportunity Grant from the Federal Transit Administration in late 2014 to invest in bus stop and customer waiting shelter improvements that enhance access to employment and educational opportunities. These grant funds, along with state and local money, were used to fund the Better Bus Stops program.

Planning, development and implementation of the community engagement model between Metro Transit and community partners occurred between late 2014 and early 2017, with the active community engagement occurring between March 2016 and March 2017.
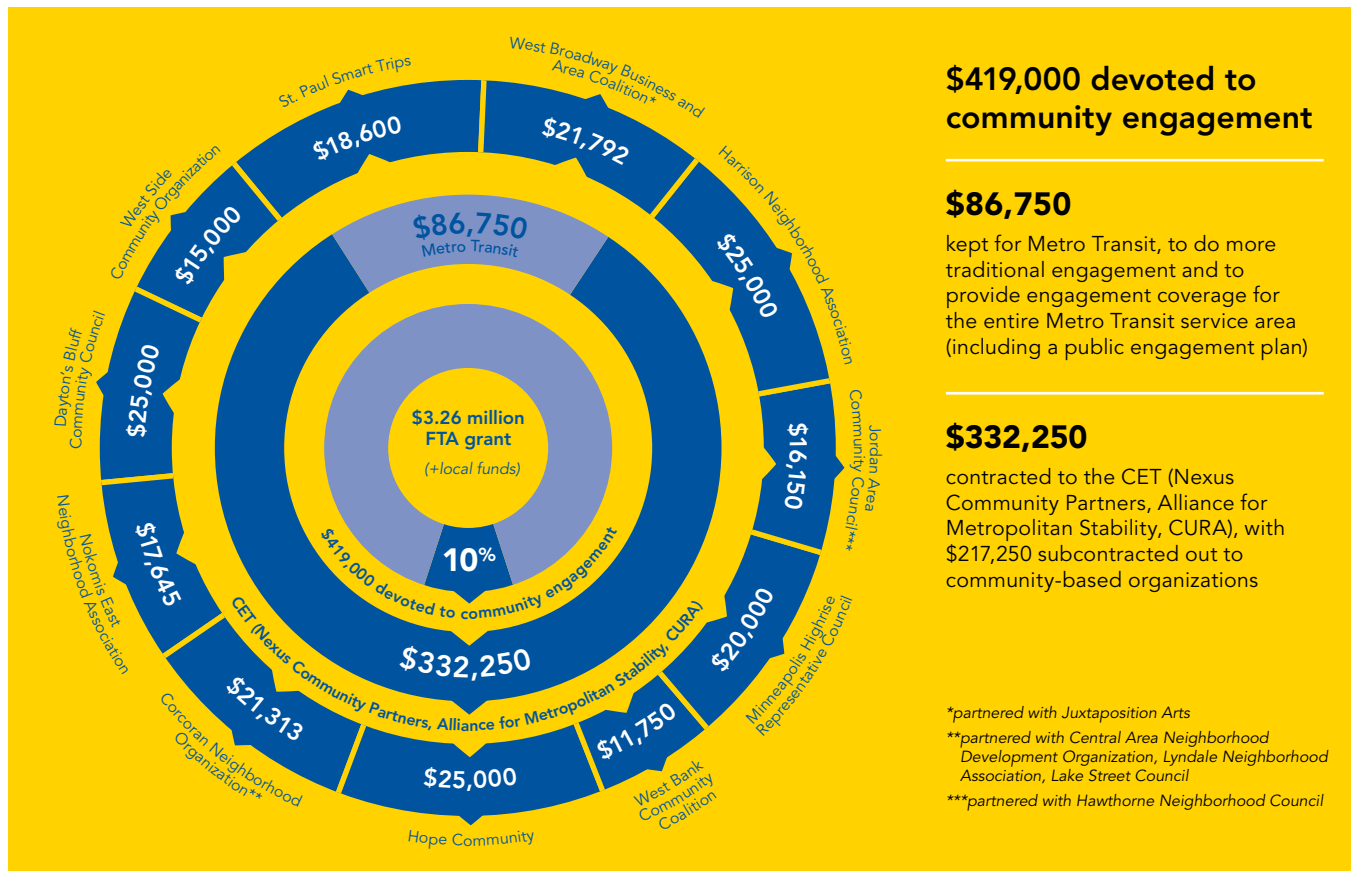
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NUMBERS

From March 2016 to March 2017, leaders from traditionally underrepresented communities engaged with an estimated 6,000 people from their communities. In combination of all Better Bus Stops community engagement strategies, approximately 185 community engagement events were held. In total, an estimated 7,000 people participated in Better Bus Stops community engagement.

Community Engagement Budget

Ten percent of the Ladders of Opportunity Grant plus local funds totaling $419,000 were dedicated to community engagement. Of this, $86,750 was retained by Metro Transit to create a public engagement plan including more traditional engagement and providing engagement coverage for the entire Metro Transit service area. The rest of the funds—$332,250—were contracted to the CET, with $217,250 of that amount subcontracted out to 11 community-based organizations through a community-led selection process via individual subcontracts ranging between $11,750 and $25,000.

This model – funding a cohort of community organizations to participate in Metro Transit's community engagement work and giving the funding decision-making to community organizations – was developed through the Metropolitan Council and CET's work on the Corridors of Opportunity initiative. Corridors of Opportunity was an initiative focused on accelerating the development of the region's transit system and providing opportunities for development to connect people of all incomes and backgrounds to jobs, housing choices, recreation, and services. Funded by the Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Communities Grant and Living Cities collaboration, this initiative was implemented in 2011-2013. The Better Bus Stops community engagement model built off the successes of Corridors of Opportunity.

$419,000 devoted to community engagement

$86,750

kept for Metro Transit, to do more traditional engagement and to provide engagement coverage for the entire Metro Transit service area (including a public engagement plan)

$332,250

contracted to the CET (Nexus Community Partners, Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, CURA), with $217,250 subcontracted out to community-based organizations

*partnered with Juxtaposition Arts

**partnered with Central Area Neighborhood Development Organization, Lyndale Neighborhood Association, Lake Street Council

***partnered with Hawthorne Neighborhood Council

Metro Transit Public Engagement Plan

The Metropolitan Council's Public Engagement Plan framework was collaboratively created with the Community Engagement Steering Committee, a committee formed from the Corridors of Opportunity project with representatives from organizations previously granted to conduct engagement work within a Metropolitan Council project or initiative. This framework, along with the Metropolitan Council's commitment to equity reflected in Thrive MSP 2040, guided the Better Bus Stops community engagement strategy. The Public Engagement Plan for Better Bus Stops offered multiple channels for feedback and a variety of entry points for community members to get involved.

Goals and Desired Outcomes

Metro Transit's Better Bus Stops community engagement goals were:

- Engaging and centering the people and communities who are traditionally under-represented in transit decision-making, but are most affected by these decisions.
- Engaging the community in discussions focusing on equity and policy surrounding the investment of resources at the bus stop level to influence the criteria the agency uses to prioritize bus stops improvements – namely, Shelter Placement Guidelines*.
- Fostering greater transparency on Metro Transit decision-making and providing more information about bus stop improvements.
- Creating opportunities to build capacity within the community on transit issues.
- Documenting and sharing lessons learned from this model of community engagement.

WHAT ARE SHELTER PLACEMENT GUIDELINES?

Metro Transit made a commitment to review and update the shelter placement guidelines to reflect transit customer and community priorities.

With over 12,000 bus stops, Metro Transit must prioritize where shelters are located. Metro Transit has historically used these guidelines to consider shelter locations:

- To qualify for a shelter, a suburban location must have at least 25 passenger boardings per day.
- In Minneapolis and St. Paul, a location must have at least 40 passenger boardings per day.
- Periodically, Metro Transit removes shelters from bus stops when passenger boardings fall far below the minimum guidelines.

Once a bus stop is identified as a priority for a shelter, site factors such as available space, slope and obstructions determine if a shelter can be located at a bus stop.

The rationale for a lower threshold for suburban communities was to distribute shelters among different cities in the region where there are fewer people using bus stops, and a belief that transit customers were waiting longer in the suburbs where transit service is generally less frequent. As the Metropolitan Council finalized its policy plan Thrive MSP 2040 and brought greater attention to regional equity, community leaders and policy makers questioned the fairness of using two different passenger boardings criteria for urban and suburban cities.

Essential Questions

Metro Transit had an interest in updating the shelter placement guidelines, but lacked information about community and transit customer priorities for shelters and bus stop features. Staff across work units brainstormed detailed questions that they faced in their work on shelters and bus stop improvements. There was a need for real answers from the community, rather than relying on staff assumptions. The detailed questions were summarized and broadened to become the five essential questions.

Each question begins, "With equity as the goal" because of the community concern about inequitable distribution of resources.

1. **Shelter Locations: With equity as the goal, what do community members think is important in deciding which bus stops have customer shelters? What community priorities could factor into decisions related to locating shelters?**

   This question was asked because the answers will inform guidelines for how bus stops are prioritized for shelters.

2. **Shelter Features: With equity as the goal, how do community members prioritize the addition of a heater and interior light within the shelter? What community priorities could factor into decisions related to the addition of a heater and interior light? What priority does community place on transit information at the bus stop?**

   This question was asked because the answers will inform guidelines for how shelters are prioritized for lighting and heating improvements.

3. **Historical Significance: Are there buildings/structures/areas within your neighborhood that are historically important to the community? If so, what are they?**

   This question was asked to help ensure the placement of shelters would not interfere with or detract from historic or cultural resources near the bus stops under consideration for capital improvements.

   Metro Transit wanted to find out if there were historic and cultural resources near bus stops where we were considering adding a shelter. To be considered for federal funding, projects are required to identify any properties that are potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and assess whether the improvement would affect the property, per the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (called Section 106).

4. **Shelter Design and Orientation: How much does the shelter style and its location in the sidewalk area affect the customer, pedestrian and property owner experiences?**

   This question was asked because the answers will inform Metro Transit's urban design decisions about how to fit a shelter to a site.

5. **Regional Equity: In what other ways is Metro Transit able to help community in accessing opportunity and achieving more just and fair inclusion in our region?**

   This question was asked because the answers will help inform Metro Transit about how to address and progress on transit equity, with the full recognition that shelters and bus stops are a limited piece of the transit experience.

Community Engagement Team and subcontractors

What is the model?

Metro Transit's main community engagement strategy included a partnership with the CET.

Metro Transit contracted with the CET to lead a process of selecting community-based organizations for 11 community engagement subcontracts based in the Better Bus Stops focus neighborhoods:

- West Broadway Business and Area Coalition and Juxtaposition Arts
- Harrison Neighborhood Association
- Jordan Area Community Council and Hawthorne Neighborhood Council
- Minneapolis Highrise Representative Council
- Hope Community
- Corcoran Neighborhood Association, Central Area Neighborhood Development Organization, Lyndale Neighborhood Association, Lake Street Council
- Nokomis East Neighborhood Association
- St. Paul Smart Trips
- West Side Community Organization
- Dayton's Bluff Community Council
- West Bank Community Coalition

The subcontracts provided resources to community organizations, which allowed engagement to be grounded in the expertise of community-based organizations in their own neighborhoods and constituencies and centering those most impacted by decisions around transit resources and bus stop improvements. These 11 subcontracts covered 22 of the project's 40 focus areas. Subcontracts were one year in length, starting in March 2016.

The CET was critical in bringing together representatives from the public, non-profit community organizations, and a large government agency to build the working relationships needed for to achieve the Better Bus Stops community engagement goals.

As an intermediary, the CET offered relationships, trust, and access to community partners that otherwise would not have been available to Metro Transit to create a deeper pool of subcontract applicants. Over the cohort's year of work, the CET served in both advocacy and accountability roles for the subcontractors, managing the subcontracts, and providing technical support throughout the project.

Planning with the CET

When Metro Transit staff and the CET learned in late 2014 that the Ladders of Opportunity grant would fund community engagement work modeled after Corridors of Opportunity, there were a series of steps to establish the working relationship and expectations for the project before the cohort was formed. Metro Transit and CET had to understand common goals, learn the strengths and expertise each organization brought to the project, negotiate roles and responsibilities, problem-solve and develop trust.

The CET's report affirms the value of time spent on the front-end of the initiative,

> *"There is a level of pre-work that must be conducted on both sides of the relationship at the outset of a community engagement project like Better Bus Stops…It is important for both parties to discuss expectations and outcomes for the community engagement process, and to share their definitions and understandings of what community engagement and the process is." This builds "trust between the two parties, which is necessary for community engagement. Without trust from the funder/overseeing organization, it is impossible for community-based organizations to successfully conduct their work with freedom to do engagement in the way that they know works best for their community."*

Forming the Cohort

The CET led a community-driven process for selecting community organizations to do engagement work. The CET created a Request for Proposal and a subcontractor selection committee that consisted of community members who read proposals, conducted site visits and helped make the decisions on which organizations were awarded subcontracts. This model allowed the decision-making on subcontract awards to be transparent and collaborative.

Metro Transit and the CET worked together to provide technical and educational resources to the subcontractors to support engagement efforts, ensuring that that subcontractors had adequate information to be successful.

One way this happened was through a cohort learning model – building relationships, sharing information and lessons learned between Metro Transit staff, the CET and subcontracted community partners. Four quarterly sessions were held throughout the active year of engagement and subcontracts. While Metro Transit had a lot of technical information to share early on, the cohort process quickly made evident the expertise brought by each community partner. For example, some organizations had much success and experience engaging with seniors, while others were experts at engaging with youth. After the quarterly sessions, each community organization submitted a quarterly report of the community engagement activities undertaken, the findings from their communities on the essential questions and evaluation on the process.
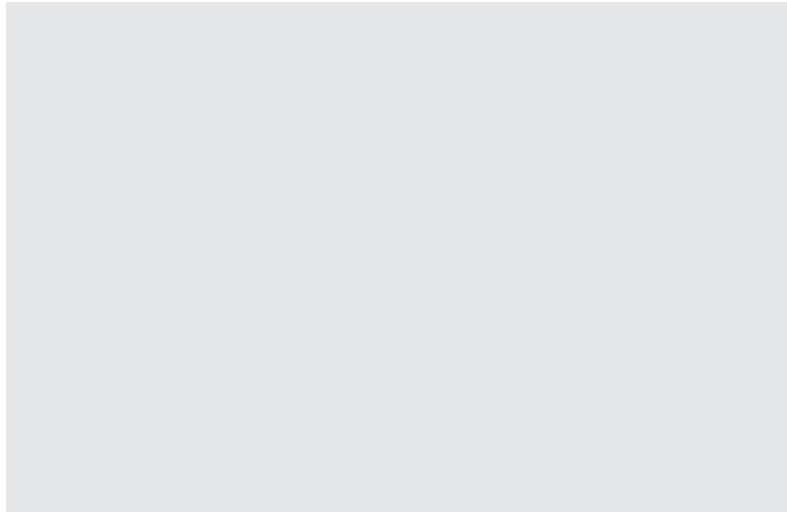
Cohort Resources

Metro Transit initially created a set of resources and information to share with subcontractors so they could lead their own engagement. Additionally, at the subcontractor orientation Metro Transit staff asked what subcontractors wanted to learn more about. Metro Transit's goal was to provide necessary information and resources early on so that the subcontractors could move forward in their work.

Some of the tangible resources created and offered to subcontractors included:

- File Sharing – Use of an online tool to share and store relevant materials and documents. This created a centralized spot for Metro Transit and the CET to share resources throughout the process, share notes and presentations and ongoing reports, and subcontractors could use to track their own project's progress and material creation.
- Q&As – Metro Transit collected, documented and answered questions from different sessions. As a way to make the information accessible, a question from one person or organization was

answered and shared for the benefit of all subcontractors. Beyond the cohort, this was also shared publicly on the Better Bus Stops website.

- Information Session – Early in the subcontractor process, Metro Transit designed an information session with six staff presentations on topics identified by subcontractors as being important to them and to remove obstacles in gathering answers to the essential questions. Topics ranged from introduction to bus service planning to regional transit systems providers and funding. Each presentation included an opportunity for questions, which were documented, answered and shared with attendees and on the website. Additionally, each presentation was recorded and shared via video. Providing information about Metro Transit operations and decision-making in an accessible and public way helped to foster transparency and build subcontractor understanding of relevant transit topics.

- Bus stop facilities game – an activity developed by Metro Transit to lead people through a prioritization and planning process around bus stop features and their costs.

Survey

Metro Transit created a survey to better understand the features people find important at bus stops and where people think waiting shelters are most important. It was designed both for subcontractor use if they chose to use it, and as a tool for Metro Transit staff to hear from people living anywhere in the region. The survey was an efficient way to broaden the geographic reach of the community engagement.

While this was intended to be just one of several engagement strategies and not the only way to gather feedback, it was a significant tool for gathering one, sizable quantitative dataset. Having a primary survey allowed Metro Transit to analyze the data comprehensively.

The survey was available in the region's four most common languages – English, Spanish, Somali and Hmong.

There were several survey collection strategies:

- Online – the survey was available electronically on the Better Bus Stops website for seven months. The survey was promoted on the Metro Transit home page, through outreach to staff at various cities around the region and in communications with policy makers.

- Subcontractors – used the survey in a variety of ways. Metro Transit wanted to create a survey as a potential tool for subcontractors so they wouldn't have to spend their limited timelines and resources on survey creation. Some used it, some adapted it to create their own customized survey, and some created their own. Some used the online version, some used paper copies depending on how they were showing up in their communities.

- Metro Transit staff – Staff promoted the survey to all of the neighborhood organizations within the project's 40 focus neighborhoods, tabling at community events, and via pop-up engagement at bus stops and transit centers around the region.

Neighborhood Presentation Tour

Metro Transit staff offered a presentation to all neighborhood organizations who had proposed bus stops improvements in their neighborhoods. Staff presented to a total of 23 neighborhoods and 261 people, sharing a project overview, highlights of the community engagement model and specific improvements for that neighborhood.

Pop-Up Engagement

To foster direct engagement with transit riders, and achieve broader coverage by targeting specific locations, Metro Transit staff visited 12 transit centers and bus stops in 11 cities to facilitate conversations and gather feedback on the essential questions. Two hundred thirty-seven people were engaged in conversation, an activity using stickers to rank preferred types of locations for bus stop improvements or filling out a survey.

Website

As a way to lead through transparency of information, the Better Bus Stops website broke down a complicated federal grant and bus shelter improvement process into an easily digestible format that made sense to local stakeholders. Bus stops were categorized and mapped by neighborhood. An interested neighbor could see if stops in their community were "under consideration," "in process/completed" or "no longer being considered" with explanation of why that decision was made. Staff heard positive feedback during outreach activities on this tool.

Property Owner Outreach

To keep stakeholders up to date on the capital improvement progress, Metro Transit led a communication and notification process for City Council members and Metropolitan Council members, neighborhood organizations, and property owners and tenants immediately adjacent to upcoming bus stop improvements. This involved a series of letters, calls and door-knocking.

Agency Internal Engagement

Metro Transit staff involved, communicated and sought input from key departments, staff and leaders within Metro Transit and the Metropolitan Council. In addition to the core Better Bus Stops project team, there was a working group comprised of staff whose departments interacted with the project.

With the project's focus on putting equity policies into practice, the project team was positioned to work across departments and think critically about barriers that the agency may create through unexamined decisions. The focus on community engagement required intentionality from the project team to foster learning and buy-in from staff on the value that community engagement brings to Metro Transit's work.

Staff created opportunities for peer sharing, including sessions to share about the project and answer questions. Additionally, staff sought out key departments to share community engagement results with as both an update and as a way to gather how other departments and projects can use the feedback and lessons learned gained through the Better Bus Stops community engagement process.

For example, since there was a lot of feedback about bus service frequency, this information was shared with bus service planners. Comments about specific routes will be included in a database of known issues, so the comments can be used when the routes are next updated. In another example, the department that manages bus stop signs is working to improve signage about detours. The community feedback about detour communications will help them develop improvements.

In a more formal way, there were several presentations made to key committees and leadership groups, including: Metropolitan Council (full council), Metropolitan Council Transportation Committee, Metropolitan Council Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee, Metro Transit leadership.

Answers to the Essential Questions

Metro Transit and the CET shared the responsibilities of synthesizing the information received from community, creating three summary documents:

1. The Community Engagement Team prepared a report using subcontractors' documentation.

2. Metro Transit prepared a survey report using the quantitative survey data.

3. Metro Transit summarized the qualitative open-ended information gathered from the survey and from community engagement at bus stops and transit centers.

In this final report, each essential question is answered briefly, followed by supporting information from the three summary documents.

The comments, feedback and ideas from the community are varied. The year of active community engagement was a process of asking questions, listening and interpreting the information heard to create a summary of what was learned. The analysis and interpretation involves comparing different messages and seeking common themes - and looking for outlier comments, contradictions and complexities. Community engagement is a process, not the achievement of a single, cohesive and final answer. The summarized answers to the essential questions that follow are a milestone in that process. From here, the information can be revisited, more dialogue can occur, and meaningful information acted upon.

Sources of the answers

Community Engagement Team Report

The Community Engagement Team prepared a report which summarizes the feedback received from subcontractors on the essential questions. The CET synthesized the subcontractor organizations' quarterly reports, results from customized surveys, and stories gathered and documented in a variety of ways. The report also provides recommendations for Metro Transit to consider in advancing Better Bus Stops and in other community engagement work.

The CET's report is in the Appendices.

Better Bus Stops Survey

Metro Transit's Strategic Initiatives department – a team of analysts working to help the agency make data-driven decisions – completed an analysis of the quantitative data gathered through Metro Transit's Better Bus Stops survey.

The survey addressed questions about shelter locations and bus stop features – essential questions 1 and 2. The survey asked participants to note the importance of different features and then choose the top three most important features. Similarly, the survey asked what Metro Transit should consider

in determining where to place shelters, asking about the importance of different considerations and asking for the three that are most important. The survey also asked for information about participants' transit usage and demographics.

There were 2,013 survey participants. It is exceptional that the demographics of survey participants – race, age, income, gender, Latino/Hispanic ethnicity – matches the demographics of transit riders as a whole.

In the survey report, the analysts commented about the survey's participation:

> *"Commonly, surveys posted online only, without an intentional community engagement strategy to target traditionally underrepresented demographics, would not get results that are representative of transit riders as a whole. Not only were surveys successfully collected in the Better Bus Stops focus area, but responses are also generally representative of the age, gender, Hispanic/Latino status, and race of 2014 bus riders [the most recent demographic snapshot of bus riders]. This will help ensure that analysis results reflect the general attitude of transit riders, and not just a few, overrepresented, demographic groups."*

Notable points about Better Bus Stops survey participation:

- 36% of respondents are people of color.
- 4% are youth under age 18.
- 10% are seniors age 65+.
- 36% are people without access to a car.
- 20% indicated having a disability.
- 38% ride five or more days a week and only 5% said they never ride the bus.
- Survey respondents live in all 7 counties of the region, with higher concentration of survey respondents living in the Better Bus Stops focus areas.
- 57% learned about the survey from a Better Bus Stops community organization.

Survey results identified slight differences in responses across demographic groups, but ultimately reflect universal themes. Although statistically significant results are reported, there are no fundamental differences amid various demographic groups.

That traditionally underrepresented communities are well represented in the survey is one measure of the value brought by subcontractor community organizations. They were successful in bringing the survey to their communities and facilitating their participation. As was learned from the cohort, organizations used their relationships in the community to have conversations in ways that would not have been possible had Metro Transit staff or transit project consultants initiated the conversation. For example, one community organizer talked about being a mother figure to many youth in her community, and she used that influence to engage youth in the process.

The full survey findings are detailed in the Survey Report in the Appendices.

Open-Ended Survey Question and Pop-Up Community Engagement

The survey concluded with the question: *What else would you like us to know or consider?* All responses to this survey question were combined with the comments received by Metro Transit staff

conducting the pop-up community engagement at bus stops and transit centers. With guidance from the Community Engagement Team and its members' research experience, a Metro Transit staff team established a process for interpreting the 700+ open-ended comments by grouping the comments into themes, interpreting the common and unique messages, and comparing the results with other information gathered through the cohort.

The detailed review and all comments are in the Survey Open-ended Comments and Pop-up Community Engagement Analysis report in the Appendices.

Shelter Locations

With equity as the goal, what do community members think is important in deciding which bus stops have customer shelters? What community priorities could factor into decisions related to locating shelters?

The priorities for deciding shelter locations:

- Where many people are waiting for the bus.
- For people who may especially need transit shelters. Near hospitals, healthcare clinics, social service centers, senior housing, housing and services for people with disabilities, where children are waiting.
- Where many people rely on transit. Where residents don't have a car, where residents have lower income.

From the Community Engagement Team

The CET's report noted:

"Community members across all of the geographies represented by the 11 subcontractors communicated that the current Metro Transit policy of ridership numbers determining improvements at bus stops creates investment disparities between urban and suburban transit. Rather, it was recommended that improvements be determined by prioritizing neighborhoods and routes where many residents and riders are heavily transit-reliant and do not have access to cars and areas where there has been a history of disinvestment."

"We are asking for no more than what Summit Hill, Grand Avenue, and the suburbs get in funding and support with transportation." –Subcontractor

"[The bus system] has helped my family to attend doctor appointments, grocery stores when there are no other options. It helps us survive." – Survey Respondent

"There is a certain 'classism' at the bus stops. Poor people and people of color's bus stops aren't as nice and well-lit with heat and electronic schedules, as buses going to richer neighborhoods." –Survey Respondent

"We need to feel safe and be considered viable citizens." –Survey Respondent

From the Survey

The following criteria for prioritizing shelter locations were most commonly rated as essential:

- Near hospitals, clinics, social service centers, and senior housing
- In areas where many people do not own vehicles and rely on transit, and
- At stops where there is not very good lighting and riders are concerned about their personal safety.

From Open-Ended Comments

Common themes for priority shelter locations were:

- Bus stops serving people with disabilities, seniors, children, low income people, people that depend on transit
- Bus stops serving jobs or schools
- Bus stops where there isn't a nearby shelter
- Bus stops where there are traffic safety concerns
- Bus stops where there are many riders

In addition, many respondents commented about specific stops or neighborhoods.

Representative comments include:

"Please make sure that other communities who are more reliant on Metro Transit and have less automobile access receive the bulk of upgrades, as they are the communities most significantly affected by the lack of shelters and safe bus stops."

"Disabled people and children"

"Even though ridership may not be as high, shelters are needed near senior housing."

"This community relies on public transportation! Other communities that are wealthier and do not rely on public transportation as much have more comfortable bus stops."

Bus Stop and Shelter Features

With equity as the goal, how do community members prioritize the addition of a heater and interior light within the shelter? What community priorities could factor into decisions related to the addition of a heater and interior light? What priority does community place on transit information at the bus stop?

The priorities for shelter and bus stop features were:

- Signage and information
- Benches
- Shelters
- Lighting
- Heaters
- Safe street crossings
- Maintenance at bus stops and shelters

From the Community Engagement Team

The CET's report elevated the following points that came through subcontractors' community engagement work:

- More heat in shelters
- More light in shelters
- More shelters at stops in areas where there are community centers, hospitals, schools, etc. and on high-use routes
- More real-time schedule and route displays
- More benches, especially in areas where there are many elderly and disabled transit riders
- Better snow removal from shelters

From the Survey

Having a bench, posted schedules, safe street crossings near the bus stop, and shelter are among the most frequent features ranked as 'essential' by survey participants. When asked to rank the top three choices, most people taking the survey skipped this question. Shelter was the most frequently chosen high-priority feature, followed by heaters and posted schedules for the buses that serve the stop.

From Open-Ended Comments

Common themes:

Priority Shelter and Bus Stop Features

- Shelter lights and street lighting
- Heaters, and better heaters
- Maintenance and cleanliness at bus stops and shelters
- Benches
- Snow and ice clearing at bus stops
- Shelters

Transit Information and signage

- Route information and up-to-date information
- Real Time Signs
- More signage: maps, "no smoking", wayfinding
- Mobile apps and technology
- Language, making information accessible to people with limited English proficiency

Representative comments include:

"Via smart phones I can get schedules and real time information. But when a bus isn't coming for longer than 15 minutes it is nice to have a dry place to sit. Also, some folks like my ma need a place to sit due to old age pains."

"What I want is good quality bus shelters."

"Bus shelters with lighting, heat, benches and maps are extremely helpful to those of us who rely on transit."

"Parents with small children are not safe at bus stops with poorly lit areas."

"Routes, time tables and bus stops work well for able people without kids or equipment, but don't work well for the disabled, people with kids, and people who don't speak English."

"More important than building: MAINTENANCE!!! keep stops clean and PLOWED!!!!!"

"Equity is: fairness to everyone on a bus. This includes access to the bus for people with canes, walkers, wheel chairs, etc. This includes both the bus itself and snow removal to the bus stop."

Historical Significance

Are there buildings/structures/areas near bus stops within your neighborhood that are historically important to the community? If so, what are they?

Metro Transit asked subcontractors to find out about historically important locations in their communities to help ensure the placement of shelters would not interfere with or detract from historic or cultural resources near the bus stops under consideration for capital improvements.

Subcontractors collectively identified 25 historically and culturally significant places in their focus areas. Metro Transit staff reviewed these locations to see if they were near any bus stops that were planned for shelter improvements. For those that were near a planned improvement, Metro Transit is using that information to consider if the improvements would have any potential effects on those locations. The locations are listed in the Community Engagement Team's report, in the appendices.

Design

How much does the shelter style and its location in the sidewalk area affect the customer, pedestrian and property owner experiences?

The priorities for shelter style and bus stop design:

- **A safe path to the bus stop, and safe environment at the bus stop.** There was a broad range of feedback about safety, including safe street crossings, a waiting area clear of traffic, sidewalk and level boarding area, security and personal safety, sight lines and visibility. The cohort of community organizations deepened awareness that comments about safety and personal security mean different things among different communities and individuals. Experiences and concerns about safety vary based on lived experience, perceptions, and identities related to age, race, ethnicity, gender, and physical ability.
- **Design for all ages and abilities.**
- **Better weather protection**, including a desire for enclosed shelters and shelter walls that meet the ground.

From the Community Engagement Team

The CET recommends that Metro Transit further work with communities to understand their unique safety concerns, and develop actions to address them.

The report notes, "Safety must be addressed through an equity lens because of the different ways that safety shapes and defines bus riders' experiences depending on their location, identity, and other factors."

"We heard from the majority of subcontractors that safety was a top concern for their community members when using transit. The diversity of comments and suggestions on this topic show that safety is defined and addressed differently in every community."

From Open-Ended Comments

Significant themes about shelter style and bus stop design:

- Accessibility and context on the street: site design at the bus stop; need for level bus stop landing (ADA pads), safe street crossings, sidewalks; putting the stop near businesses; designing shelters and bus stops for all ages and abilities; designing for traffic safety and personal security.
- More shelter from the weather

Representative comments include:

"Wider sidewalks are a must. Too often I can't be visible to flag the bus without being dangerously close to fast driving automobile traffic. When I have a toddler with me I'm 10 times more anxious doing this."

"Legible, easily visible signs, a safe place to stand out of the grass and snow, adequate lighting, a big enough no parking zone so that the bus can pull up to the stop, and a safe way to walk to the stop should be included at all stops. This is 1000x more important than more shelters."

"The design on the glass of the shelters makes it difficult to see an approaching bus."

"Stops alongside freeways are dangerous design"

*"Bus stops should be safe, less isolated, closer to businesses/churches"*

Regional Equity

In what other ways is Metro Transit able to help community in accessing opportunity and achieving more just and fair inclusion in our region?

In conversations with transit customers and the community, comments were received about all aspects of the transit experience, not just about bus stops. The importance of listening to the entire transit experience was elevated by the community organization subcontractors.

The Community Engagement Team helped deepen the Metro Transit staff team's understanding of the value brought by these "other" comments, and provided useful feedback as staff established a process for sharing the community engagement results within the agency. The broad-ranging community feedback is a resource for Metro Transit as it strives to advance regional equity.

Community

How results are used at Metro Transit

Document and summarize results

Metro Transit departments

It is a priority for the Better Bus Stops community engagement work that results are circulated within the Metro Transit, and to keep communicating with the community about how the results are used.
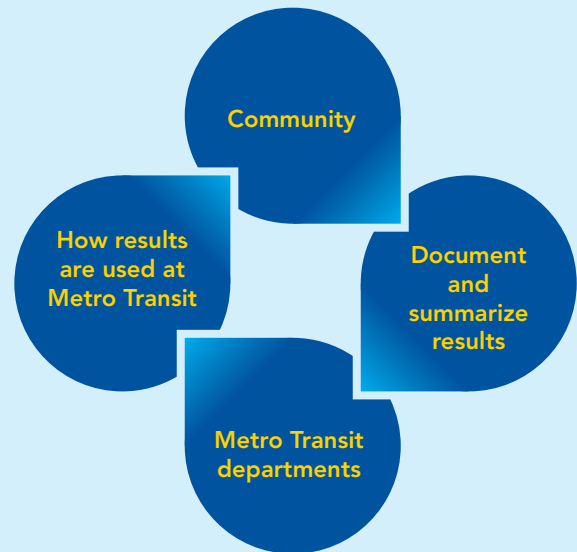
From the Community Engagement Team

The CET report noted that equity is a central consideration in the recommendation to prioritize bus stop improvements based on neighborhoods and routes where many residents and riders are heavily transit-reliant, where there has been a history of disinvestment.

Other frequently heard feedback about topics not related to bus stops noted by the CET:

- Buses that run late and off-schedule create significant problems and unsafe situations for bus riders
- Discrimination and rudeness by bus drivers can create unpleasant and unsafe experiences for bus riders
- Some bus riders do not feel as though there is adequate follow-up or action after they file a complaint through Metro Transit
- Transit inaccessibility for elderly transit riders and people with disabilities
- Bus riders acknowledging and appreciating being engaged by Metro Transit, and eager to share their experiences with transit

From Open-Ended Comments

Common themes about the transit experience:

Bus Service and Operations

- More bus routes
- Better on-time service
- More frequent bus service
- Bus stop consolidation (don't have bus stops so close together)
- Respectful and safe drivers
- Span of service (provide bus service earlier and later, on weekends)
- Experience on the bus, priority seating area, strollers
- Better timed transfers
- Crowded buses

Equitable distribution of resources

- Disparities in the quality of Metro Transit and suburban transit authorities' vehicles, service and facilities
- Geographic-based disparities, that some neighborhoods get more shelters or nicer bus stops than others
- Prioritize resources for people who rely on transit, people with disabilities, seniors, people with limited English proficiency, Areas of Concentrated Poverty where 50 percent or more of residents are people of color (ACP50)

Fares

- Lower fares
- Free passes
- Fare enforcement

Safety

- Safety features (cameras, emergency buttons)
- Lighting
- Policing
- Pedestrian safety
- Youth
- Drugs/alcohol

Other comments

- General compliment
- Comment about the survey

Representative comments include:

"There is a lot of attention on new lines and new service, but not the same commitment to regular bus service"

"Metro Transit should serve the people who NEED it first"

"Provide the same service to my community that you do to others"

"Make inner city bus service as pleasant as suburban buses"

"The 22 stops very fast, takes off quick. Rude driver. Discrimination because of Spanish speaking"

"The bus stops are too close together. People could get to their designation faster if there wasn't a stop every block. People can walk an extra block and get there 15 minutes faster."

"Having more options to get to suburbs. And buses that run more frequently and on the weekends that don't now. Like the 61 doesn't run on Sundays."

"Too expensive to ride whenever I want to"

"We need more police on the bus"

"It is very frustrating when buses run 5 to 10 minutes ahead of schedule, especially when the buses are infrequent. When it is cold, I have to get to an un-sheltered stop 15 minutes early in order to not miss my bus."

Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

Accomplishments

Better Bus Stops community engagement was successful in reaching its goals. These were the goals established at the beginning of the engagement process.

> Engaging and centering the people and communities who are traditionally under-represented in transit decision-making, but are most affected by these decisions.

Leaders from traditionally underrepresented communities participated as subcontractors to engage with an estimated 6,000 people from their communities. They were instrumental in getting survey participation that demographically represents that of transit riders' as a whole in terms of race and ethnicity, income, age, ability and gender. In combination of all Better Bus Stops community engagement strategies, approximately 185 community engagement events were held.

In total, an estimated 7,000 people participated in Better Bus Stops community engagement.

Because the subcontractors successfully gathered feedback from communities that well-represent transit riders, because the information was gathered through trusted relationships and with methods best customized for their communities - Metro Transit now has a more accurate picture of its customers' interests. This is true particularly about the bus stop waiting experience but also about many aspects of Metro Transit's service.

> Engaging the community in discussions focusing on equity and policy surrounding the investment of resources at the bus stop level to influence the criteria the agency uses to prioritize bus stops improvements – namely, the Shelter Placement Guidelines.

By learning about communities' bus stop improvement priorities, Metro Transit now has information that will help it to update its shelter placement guidelines.

Further, Metro Transit has deepened its relationships with community organizations and strengthened its community engagement practice. The experience Metro Transit gained through Better Bus Stops will benefit the agency's community outreach and engagement as it brings draft shelter placement guidelines to the public for review and comments later this year.

In addition, the legacy of Better Bus Stops community engagement will include Metro Transit departments applying this feedback to their work, continued relationships among the cohort participants, and a strengthened community engagement practice within Metro Transit.

Fostering greater transparency on Metro Transit decision-making and providing more information about bus stop improvements.

In developing resources and information for subcontractors, Metro Transit expanded the availability of information for the public. This was largely achieved with the Better Bus Stops website, which launched a new practice for Metro Transit to publicly share detailed information about planned capital improvements at the bus stops. The information about transit operations and decisions generated from the cohort's work are available online.

The commitment to tracking and sharing information led to the creation of better data about bus stop improvements, which benefits the agency in many ways, from having more accurate data about the features at each shelter, to newly kept information about why some bus stops haven't received shelters, such as due to lack of available space.

The value of transparency manifested not only in the community engagement model, but also in how Metro Transit communicated forthcoming bus stop improvements and construction to property owners, residents, policy makers, partner government agencies, and neighborhood organizations.

Creating opportunities to build capacity within the community on transit issues.

The CET's report notes that one of the clearest successes of the Better Bus Stops engagement process was the development of leaders within the subcontractors' organizations and communities.

From the CET's report:

> *"For example, St. Paul Smart Trips leveraged their project funding to develop youth interns to conduct community engagement and deepen their understanding of their communities' unique transit concerns. Two of those youth interns have now been offered Lead Intern positions at Smart Trips.*
>
> > *'While surveying [for Better Bus Stops] at the Adult Basic Education School on Lake Street, we met Marvin. He took the survey and was so enthusiastic we hired him. His work was beyond extraordinary. He was the hardest working individual on the team. After the project ended he ran for a position on our board and was voted in.'*
> > *–Corcoran Neighborhood Organization"*

Metro Transit staffs' experience working with Harrison Neighborhood Association to make a successful presentation at a conference is one example of the power in building capacity within the community on transit issues. Harrison's presenters provided powerful testimony at the conference about how, through Better Bus Stops, their community built their expertise on the transit system they use.

Documenting and sharing lessons learned from this model of community engagement.

Better Bus Stops' focus on transparency and information sharing has meant that documentation was a focus throughout the project. However, documenting community engagement work presents challenges. Informal conversations among community members do not lend themselves to video recording, photos, or detailed note-taking. Yet, documenting what was learned from the community and the workings of the community engagement model are critical. This report aims to summarize both the community engagement model and what was learned through that process. In considering the accomplishments of the project, the lessons learned – reminders for what to do next time – are highlighted below.

Lessons Learned

Community partnership

Co-creation of this model with the CET involved Metro Transit giving up decision-making power in several ways, which was essential in creating the conditions and space for community leadership and ownership of the work and outcomes. Examples of this include who and how community engagement subcontracts were awarded, along with empowering community organizations to build off their expertise and create their own customized engagement plans for their constituencies.

Survey

One important lesson from the survey was to not underestimate the time and effort required to design, create, implement, distribute, and analyze a survey. In the early stages, make a plan for:

- Design – The Better Bus Stops survey contained flaws. The lesson learned is to have an expert leading the survey effort from the beginning.

- Participation – Be intentional to ensure respondents are representative of ridership and include voices that are often left out. Collect demographic data to understand if, as a group, those participating in the survey are similar to transit riders. This information can also help in understanding the priorities of different groups of people, such as youth or seniors. Don't just rely on online promotion, but create an outreach plan that will bring the survey directly to transit riders.

- Distribution – Consider the specific survey distribution methods and how the format of the survey supports the methods. If planning to do significant survey collection at bus stops or riding the bus, consider the length of the survey and the time it takes for someone to fill it out. Test the draft survey in the field to understand if the survey is well designed for the chosen distribution method.

- Analysis – Know who will be analyzing the data, how, and for what purpose while the survey is being developed. The Better Bus Stops survey results are informative because of the robust data analysis, rather than relying on the basic reports that an online survey platform provides.

- Transparency – Share the information and results back with stakeholders through similar methods as the survey was distributed; in the case of Better Bus Stops, online and with subcontractor organizations. Share how the agency will use the information gathered and what it will impact.

Essential Questions

Create key questions the project team needs to learn from community so that the answers will inform a decision. Design outreach and engagement strategies around these questions, including how the information will be collected, organized, and analyzed. Make sure the questions are easily understood and comprised of plain language. Be clear on what the answers to the questions will impact, and which staff and departments are the owners of this.

Be thoughtful about the timing of engagement, to ensure it aligns with the timing of what will be influenced. Don't ask community for feedback if the decisions are already made.

Know that even with a specific focus to what community feedback is gathering, in any engagement process people will share input on a variety of topics. For Better Bus Stops, that meant Metro Transit got a lot of ideas on bus stop improvements, but also heard a lot about broader transit issues. Design engagement to anticipate this, and figure out how to document and share with relevant staff and stakeholders. Keep articulating to the community about what decisions are ready for their influence, and which community concerns will be heard but may not be acted upon in the near term.

Staff project team and stakeholders

Establish clear roles and responsibilities among agency staff and project team, especially when multiple departments or work units are involved. In addition to project manager, Better Bus Stops had a community engagement lead, planning lead, and engineering lead who worked very closely together throughout the project to facilitate connection points between the capital project and community engagement process. Much collaboration happened along the way, and clarifying the roles helps collaboration be more effective.

Know which staff and departments are decision-makers and influencers. Co-create the engagement opportunity from the beginning rather than trying to wedge in an engagement process when it's too late for it to influence decisions. Craft the engagement questions together, directly responding to staff needs. Agree from the beginning what the feedback will influence and what decisions will be impacted.

Funding

There was tremendous value in having dedicated community engagement funding and knowing the exact amount from the beginning of the process. This allowed for thoughtful rather than last-minute planning for the community engagement required, and ultimately was the reason Metro Transit could invest and innovate on a community engagement model that worked so intensively with community partners.

Resourcing Community

The community engagement model was successful because community partners were compensated for their work and came to the cohort as full partners. All the players "at the table" were paid to be there, rather than paid professional staff and volunteer community members. This created the conditions for leadership development and community ownership of the process and results – which ultimately yielded high quality results.

Because Better Bus Stops was a year of work by the cohort, the relationships built do not end with the conclusion of the contracts and associated funding. As the year of work concluded, Metro Transit agreed to collaborate on presentations about the results of Better Bus Stops, keep in contact as

the shelter placement guidelines are updated, and to generally maintain the working relationships. Metro Transit and the CET continue to work together on evaluating the Better Bus Stops work. Metro Transit and cohort members continues to communicate about the results of their work and current opportunities for agency-community involvement.

There is value in resourcing community organizations because it yields better public participation in the decisions of a public agency. In prioritizing agency funding for projects, consider the benefits in funding community organizations to bring their expertise in shaping better outcomes.