

Chapter 3. Public Involvement Summary

3.1 Development of the Public Involvement Process

The key component of any long-range planning process is public outreach and citizen participation through a variety of methods to gather citizen data. As a result, the ERPC has committed itself to pursuing a pro-active public outreach effort throughout the development of the Erie County MPO 2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan. Public outreach efforts focused on soliciting community involvement in order to maximize awareness and provide a forum for public participation in order to build support and gain public input for the plan. The principles of the Public Involvement Plan (PIP) were to:

- Establish/maintain a partnership between residents, the business community and the core area stakeholders
- Involve the communities, local units of government early and at key junctures throughout the project
- Conduct a fair and equitable process
- Ensure that the plan reflects the goals of the expanded planning area

The Public Involvement Plan (PIP) details the techniques that were used in the LRTP to identify, notify and gain input from all those potentially affected within the study area. The techniques outlined in the plan ensured that the principles of the plan were met. The approach to public involvement for the ERPC LRTP will utilize the PIP's strategies to encourage early and on-going involvement in the project by:

- Providing helpful information
- Providing timely notice
- Providing public access to key decisions
- Ensuring consideration of significant comments

3.2 Implementation of the Public Involvement Process

Development of the Erie County MPO LRTP began in the fall of 2023, as ERPC Staff began working with Ottawa County stakeholders on the expanded MPO and defining the Metropolitan Planning Area for our MPO. In that same winter, ERPC staff began collecting a wide variety of background information and planning literature regarding existing transportation conditions in the county. The collection and analysis included current land use, transportation system data, issues identification and goals and objectives. Throughout the data collection process, staff carried out the project's public involvement process. Following the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, ERPC incorporated online elements into their public participation process as part of necessary adjustments. Today, ERPC's public involvement process is a two pronged approach that includes online activities to remain accessible to residents in the planning area, and public engagement that will incorporate meetings and stakeholder surveys to stay engaged with our regions residents for our plan development process.

3.3 Results of the Public Involvement Process

Numerous major public involvement techniques were planned to be utilized during the public involvement process. These activities included:

- Public Meeting
- Emails
- Flyers/Handouts
- Online Public Survey
- Online Stakeholder Surveys
- Newspaper advertisements
- Social media postings
- Online postings of draft plan, maps, survey results, and other related materials
- Comment forms

Public Meeting: During the course of the development of the ERPC MPO LRTP development, there were three public meetings held to inform the public of the LRTP update, gather public input, and keep the public informed on the plan's progress.

The first public meeting was held on October 23, 2024 at the Shores and Islands Visitor Center conference room in Danbury Township, Ottawa County. A second open house was held the following day on October 24th at the Erie County office building in downtown Sandusky. Newspaper ads were ran in advance of the meeting, and notices were included on the ERPC MPO website. Materials included a presentation with an overview of the MPO and plan purpose, print outs of the previous 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan maps, interactive table top exercises, and the public survey gauging local interests and priorities for planning in our region. Both formal open houses were sparsely attended, resulting in one survey over the two meetings. As part of a proactive public involvement process, ERPC staff continued to schedule at other public events to try and meet people where they are for better engagement.

A plan update public meeting was held on June 26th to review the draft plan and solicit additional comments or feedback from stakeholders and the public. The meeting was held at 3rd Floor Chambers at the Erie County Office Building in downtown Sandusky. Drafts of the plan chapters and project maps and data were printed. A presentation was prepared detailing highlights of the long range plan and its development process. Two attendees were on hand to provide feedback, and inquire on future planned projects. The comments received at the final open house were incorporated into the draft plan before final approval.

Stakeholder Surveys: ERPC Staff conducted one-on-one in person stakeholder interviews with local public officials in the summer of 2024. This included representatives from local cities, villages, and larger townships to assess the current state of project plans and developments that impact the MPO planning region. In addition to the in-person stakeholder interviews, ERPC conducted an online stakeholder surveys. Stakeholders represented public, private and non-profit interests whose organizations have a major stake in transportation and development within the planning region. Staff identified over 160 stakeholders (see public involvement appendix for full stakeholder list) to provide insight into what they considered critical in understanding the development and transportation issues impacting the MPO study area. An online survey was developed and emailed to stakeholders to better assess what business and

community leaders of the county perceive to be the key transportation issues in for the next twenty-five years; and how best to solve current or anticipated transportation problems in the future.

Staff received nine survey responses to the email survey request. The project team followed up via telephone and email with those stakeholders that did not complete the online survey in an attempt to gather additional stakeholder input. Below are the survey questions that were asked to stakeholders:

1. What transportation issues concern you with respect to your community or organization?
2. How have the needs of your community or organization changed as a result of changes in the transportation system over the last five to ten years? What have you done as an organization to combat these changes?
3. What do you see as the predominant travel patterns within and through Erie County?
4. What portion(s) of the Erie County area are difficult to access by automobile? Please be specific as possible.
5. What areas of the County do you think are most likely to develop in the next 20 years?
6. Do you think better road signage is needed? If so, where?
7. How would you characterize the Erie County area's transit opportunities? What would you want to do to improve these services?
8. Have you had experience with any alternative transportation programs (carpooling, telecommuting) in your community or within your organization?
9. Do you believe that both new development and redevelopment activities will generate significant traffic congestion and parking problems within Erie County? If so, where do you think these problem areas will be and what do you believe are potential solutions?
10. What are your impressions of the bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the Erie County area?
11. Please rank where transportation, redevelopment activities, environmental protections, and preserving the character of the community fall in the hierarchy of issues affecting the Erie County area.
12. "With respect to transportation in the Erie County area, the thing I am most concerned about is ____."
13. "While this stakeholder interview session did not address _____, I hope the Erie County 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan tackles this issue anyway."
14. What do you see as the Goals and Objectives of the Erie County 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan?

Responses: The compiled summary of responses from the online surveys and interviews are included in the public involvement appendix at the end of this document. A summary map of the issues and concerns that were collected through stakeholder interviews is shown in **Figure 3-3.1**. A majority of those surveyed indicated the following:

- Interviewees indicated that they were most concerned about multi-modal access, safety and congestion on the region's transportation network.
- The needs of the community/organization that have changed as a result the transportation system include infrastructure and regulations/policy. Many also mentioned travel patterns changing due to navigation devices/GPS routing.
- Many believed that more signage is needed along main routes (especially those leading to Cedar Point). Also, many mentioned the need for larger signs that motorists can read easier.
- Respondents felt that public transit has become more accessible and that it can be improved by expanding service, access and undergoing a fare reduction. Many also mentioned the need for bus shelters at stops and having bus pull-offs in an attempt to not to impede traffic flow on the main roads.
- A majority believed that new development and redevelopment activities have increased congestion and have created parking problems. Within the City of Sandusky (congestion) and the City of Vermilion (parking) were identified. The top solutions suggested were increasing capacity and adding parking.
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the area were perceived as needing improvement. They are viewed as being disconnected and in poor condition. Overall, improvement of facilities was recommended.
- The biggest concern about the future transportation system was funding.
- Sidewalks on US 250 (from Bogart Road to Kalahari) were also mentioned by many to be a safety concern, especially for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Additional improvements along the US 6 corridor were mentioned by many respondents.

Special Presentations: In addition to public meetings, substantial outreach efforts were planned to occur throughout the LRTP process in order to solicit community input. ERPC presented on the survey at the October Creating Healthy Communities committee, that includes various organizations focused on creating healthy living environments within Erie County. ERPC Staff presented the plan and survey separately to both the Erie and Ottawa County Mobility Management Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), hosted by Great Lakes Community Action Partnership (GLCAP) and includes a cross section of non-profits and businesses with transportation needs. In addition, ERPC staff presented at the Kiwanis organization, made up of local volunteers and business owners.

Along with the scheduled meeting presentations, ERPC staff worked to meet people where they are, and attended two local community events. The first event was Pumpkins in the Park on October 13th in Port Clinton, where staff were on hand to engage with locals new to the MPO planning area. The booth distributed Halloween candy for children, and encourage the public survey from locals. Staff also attended the Osborn MetroPark parkrun on November 2nd, a weekly 5K series at the Osborn MetroPark. Staff volunteered, distributed candy, and answered questions on local projects occurring in the MPO area.

Online Public Survey: An online survey was also created to engage the public and was launched in October of 2024. The online survey included mapping and 20 questions in a multiple-choice format. In total, there were 42 citizens that participated in the survey. Staff analyzed these survey results and utilized them throughout the planning process (see Public Involvement Appendix). In order to obtain a more condensed compilation of answers, only limited options were available for a response. Below is a summary of the analyzed results:

- Survey takers felt that US 250 (Milan Road) was the most congested route in the area
- There was support for the following: more east-west connectors to provide better access, widening road shoulders for bike lanes when applicable and widening SR 4
- 67% said they have no plans to buy an electric vehicle in the near future and 68% indicated they would not feel comfortable using an autonomous vehicle
- 57% reported access to the outlying areas of Erie County was difficult
- The most popular side road taken to avoid congestion in Sandusky and Perkins Township is Columbus Avenue
- Regarding good accessibility to Columbus, OH and east-west connections throughout the area almost 75% of respondents stated that new routes are needed
- It was reported that the area most likely to develop in the next twenty years was Sandusky's downtown waterfront and the US 250 corridor south of State Route 2
- There was a majority of positive feedback received on the improvements implemented on US 250
- In regards to bicycle and pedestrian routes, survey takers showed a preference for added facilities in and around the northern portions of Perkins Township going into the City of Sandusky
- In regard to freight, survey takers indicated that roads were the most important asset to the area

Overall Results and Issue Resolution: As documented above and below in this chapter, project planners received a wide range of comments regarding the region's transportation needs. All the comments are important for documenting existing conditions in the county and for defining goals and objectives for the plan. However, in some instances, county residents and stakeholders identified issues for which action has been, or will be, taken by state and local entities. The most frequently cited issues are provided below along with an explanation of how the issue has been addressed or will be addressed soon. It should be noted, many of the issues expressed in the original 2005 LRTP still remain relevant today. Therefore, they continue to be listed with updates on the progress to resolve those issues in the Government Action/Resolution portion of the narrative.

- ***Congestion and Safety:*** Residents and stakeholders indicated that transportation planners should be focused on roadway reliability and congestion. The top two corridors respondents felt that we

most traveled and congested in the MPO area were the US 250 and US 4 Corridors. Numerous mentions were made relative to that increased congestion is also starting to occur on local roads due to navigation/GPS routing of traffic. Also expressed was the need to increase safety for all modes of transportation.

Government Action/Resolution: ODOT financed a safety and congestion control study for US 250 north of Bogart Road that was completed in 2005. The study, evaluated a number of improvement scenarios including (but not limited to) intersection improvements such as signal timing phases and turn lane additions; signal system improvements; roadway geometry improvements; interchange improvements (US 250 and SR 2); and access management strategies including driveway consolidation, shared driveways, frontage roads and turn restrictions. MPO staff worked to obtain financing to complete the recommended improvements listed in the study. Safety funding was also obtained to complete the reconstruction of intersections located at Strub Road/US 250 and Perkins Avenue/US 250. MPO staff assisted ODOT D3 with acquiring funding to complete the remaining corridor improvements. The Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) did award funding and the project was completed in 2017. Adjustments have been made to the roadway to address ongoing safety and congestion concerns, and has seen steady improvement since the recommendations in 2005.

In 2019, a study of the US 6 Corridor (from Rye Beach Road to Sycamore Line Road including analysis of Butler Street in the City of Sandusky and Rye Beach Road to the railroad crossing in Huron) was finalized. The study's purpose was to review existing conditions and recommend improvements related to traffic flow and safety for both motorized and non-motorized users. Development along the corridor, including two large sport park facilities, along with future development and tourists utilizing the route for Cedar Point all created increased traffic volumes along the corridor. As a result of these events there has been increased congestion along the corridor during summer and fall peak times. Recommendations from the US 6 Corridor study included specific intersection, mainline and multi-modal improvements. MPO Staff and ODOT utilized the study to secure TRAC funding and Federal Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) funding for the project, and improvements are expected to begin construction in 2026.

ODOT Districts 2 and District 3 have utilized state funding to reduce congestion and improve safety at regional bottlenecks. Beginning in 2020, ODOT District 2 began work on implementation of two new roundabouts at the intersection of SR 2 and SR 53 in order to help alleviate peak summer time traffic volumes. The interchange had been challenged by vehicular congestion of recreational vehicles and trucks hauling boats to the tourist destinations in Danbury and Catawba Township. Construction of the roundabouts and area lane widening was completed in 2024. ODOT District 3 continues to address local safety concerns in Erie County, including the implementation of a roundabout at SR 4 and SR 99/Skadden Road. The safety improvements maintain traffic flows and improve safety on a key north/south corridor in the MPO planning area.

- ***Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning:*** Several comments were received regarding the lack of bicycle and pedestrian amenities in the county. Individuals stated that it is difficult to walk or bicycle in the planning region and commented on increased foot traffic in the region.

Government Action/Resolution: Since 2015, planning staff has been actively involved with the formation and facilitation of the bicycle and pedestrian committee. The committee's purpose is to work collaboratively on implementing the Bicycle and Pedestrian plan's goals. The committee consists of local jurisdictions and stakeholders. In addition to meeting with the committee throughout the year, ERPC also completed the 2020 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Update. Ottawa County established an Active Transportation Plan in 2018 and is dedicated to increasing access to safe multimodal facilities, and Greater Sandusky Partnership has actively developed a Sandusky Bay Pathway plan to help create a regional trail network. Current facilities in the region are fragmented, and impact workforce mobility and quality of life characteristics of the region. The continuation of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and coordination of three planning efforts are working to connect the isolated facilities and improve active transportation across the planning area.

- ***Impact of Future Development:*** Survey respondents largely expect future development to continue to occur along the lakefronts, including east of the city of Port Clinton with increased residential and retail development. Some residents noted development concerns along US 250 and SR 4 between the Ohio Turnpike and the city of Sandusky, as increased development would cause increased congestion. It was suggested that planning efforts should be undertaken to manage access and traffic volumes.

Government Action/Resolution: Prior to the widening of US 250 south of Bogart Road, the highway was designated as a limited access highway and the ERPC developed an Access Management Plan. Therefore, access will be controlled as development occurs south of Bogart Road on US 250. It should be further noted, the Erie County Engineer's Office completed access management regulations in April of 2006 that will guide access management throughout Erie County as a whole. In the spring of 2020, ERPC, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) District 3, Huron Township, Perkins Township, the Erie County Engineers and Sheriff Offices met to discuss pedestrian safety at the US 250 and Kalahari Drive intersection. ODOT D3 has requested and received safety funding to make improvements across US 250 which include pedestrian crossing push buttons and pavement markings. In addition, ERPC is working with Perkins Township to apply for safety funding for the installation of a sidewalk from the Bogart Road intersection to the existing sidewalk at Kalahari.

State Route 4 has come under increased attention statewide. The corridor has been studied numerous times as a crucial north-south connection dating back to the 1990's, with limited development occurring since that time. Recently, ODOT has completed the Strategic Transportation Development Analysis, identifying both the US 250 and SR 4 corridors as focus corridors as part of the Sandusky-Columbus corridor analysis. Limited access strategies and safety improvements are expected to be considered along SR 4 in future years to help manage development expectations in the region.

- ***Transit Service:*** Project planners heard that the public transit services have improved, but there is still a great need for expansion of the system, availability and for a reduction of fare costs.

Government Action/Resolution: In the last few years, the City of Sandusky has been able to increase the fixed route efficiency through the creative use of grants, contracts and local

contributions. Through these efforts, they have managed to keep the system running with the City of Sandusky covering most of the costs. It is noted that the concerns brought up span multiple government agencies since transit is something that impacts all of the local municipalities within the planning area. In regard to Erie County, planning staff has worked with the transit system in obtaining federal funds since 2003, although financial support ended in 2003 as a result of a failed levy.

Since its inception, planning staff has been working towards improving the transit system through Coordinated Planning efforts. It is noted that since the last long-range plan update the Ohio Department of Transportation has greatly changed its requirements for the Coordinated Transportation Plan Program. New procedures include the creation of a stakeholder committee consisting of all local transit providers and users. The purpose of the committee is to work towards the goals and strategies outlined in the Coordinated Transportation Plan which were derived from transit stakeholders. ERPC staff assists the local mobility manager (provided through GLCAP) in these coordination meeting efforts. It is anticipated that once planning strategies and goals are put into action, they will alleviate some of the concerns mentioned above.

- ***Reducing costs and promoting job growths:*** Several stakeholders and local citizens indicated that there is a lack of coordination and cooperation between local governments and the state to implement economic development and transportation projects. In addition, people noted that there is also a lack of coordination between the local governments and private interests and developers.

General Actions/Resolutions: Private and public partnerships have been created to develop major projects like the widening of US 250 south of Bogart Road and the US 6 Connectivity Corridor. To make these projects a reality, funding was provided not only by ODOT but also by Erie County, the City of Sandusky, the Ohio Turnpike, Lake Erie Shores and Islands and Cedar Point. These collaborations were critical to the success of both projects as part of unified plan for the region. Both counties, cities and Greater Sandusky Partnership (Formerly Erie County Economic Development Corporation) have several economic tools to help in project development such as: Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Community Reinvestment Areas (CRA), Revolving Loan Funds (RLF), Enterprise Zone tax abatements and various other state programs. Both Erie County and Ottawa County have Transportation Improvement Districts (TID) to help support infrastructure projects supporting economic development. In addition, the MPO has assisted organizations in applying for Transportation Funding (5310). Through this program agencies have been awarded transit buses and funds to conduct a feasibility study, regarding hiring a mobility manager for the area.