



# Bus Revolution

## Public Engagement Plan

May 2021

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# 1 OVERVIEW

Each day, SEPTA, the area's largest transit provider, rolls out a fleet of approximately 1,400 buses for more than 120 bus routes that cover five counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania. These bus trips represent more than half of SEPTA's overall rides. To provide more efficient service for a continuously changing region, SEPTA has commissioned a Comprehensive Bus Network Redesign (CBNR). This project integrates with the transit system's overall strategic plan, SEPTA Forward, which is moving the agency from a multimodal legacy system toward operating as a lifestyle network service.

The groundwork for the CBNR was laid over the past few years. SEPTA's 2018 Philadelphia Bus Network Choices Report (Jarrett Walker) identified the need for a comprehensive re-evaluation of the city's bus network. In March 2020, SEPTA issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the CBNR.

The CBNR provides the opportunity to reshape bus transportation in the region and re-imagine a future that addresses the following needs:

- **Shifts in population** within the region and SEPTA service area, including growth in the City of Philadelphia.
- **Changes in the nature and concentration of jobs/employment**, including entertainment venues and education facilities in the region. Employment centers are increasingly dispersed outside of Center City Philadelphia, into nearby suburbs, particularly warehousing, distribution centers, and office complexes. White-collar jobs and regional "eds and meds" institutions have concentrated in Center City. Pre-COVID, there had been growing congestion on City streets (particularly Center City), leading to slow buses and longer commutes
- **Ability to address racial, social and health disparities.** Philadelphia has the highest poverty rate among America's largest cities. Residents need to be connected to economic on-ramps, whether in current job centers or to educational opportunities that can help them land jobs that pay a living wage. Having access to reliable transportation that allows bus riders to get to and keep a job will, in turn, support changes in the systemic racial, social, and economic inequities evident in the City and the region.
- **Impacts of climate change.** Reducing reliance on cars relieves neighborhood parking shortages and major-corridor street congestion, reduces noise and greenhouse gas/carbon emissions, and improves the environmental footprint.
- **Increased competition from on-demand/rideshare services, such as Uber and Lyft.** These options provide people with advantages in convenience that is difficult for transit agencies to match, such as door-to-door service and on-demand timeliness. Transit ridership was declining even before the COVID-19 shutdowns started. It is likely that rideshare services contributed to this decline. However, SEPTA expects bus ridership to rebound at a higher rate than other modes of public transit.
- **COVID-19 pandemic workplace, school leisure and lifestyle changes** have reduced and changed ridership. However, this seismic shift has also provided an opportunity for SEPTA to restructure its bus network in a way that more closely

aligns with the way customers travel now. The CBNR can set a new vision for what the network can look like and deliver into the future. Riders are not just commuting back and forth to work from 9 to 5. They are running errands, doing essential work at off-peak hours, going to doctor's appointments, and taking care of elderly relatives. Supporting a range of lifestyles and customer needs is the future of the bus network.

- **Aligning the bus network with other parts of the transit system.** The CBNR allows for additional integration across SEPTA's service offerings, including SEPTA's Rail Transit network and Regional Rail. An increase in the number of ADA-accessible stations and free transfers will support this progress. Increased integration will allow for more direct transit links to developing parts of the region.

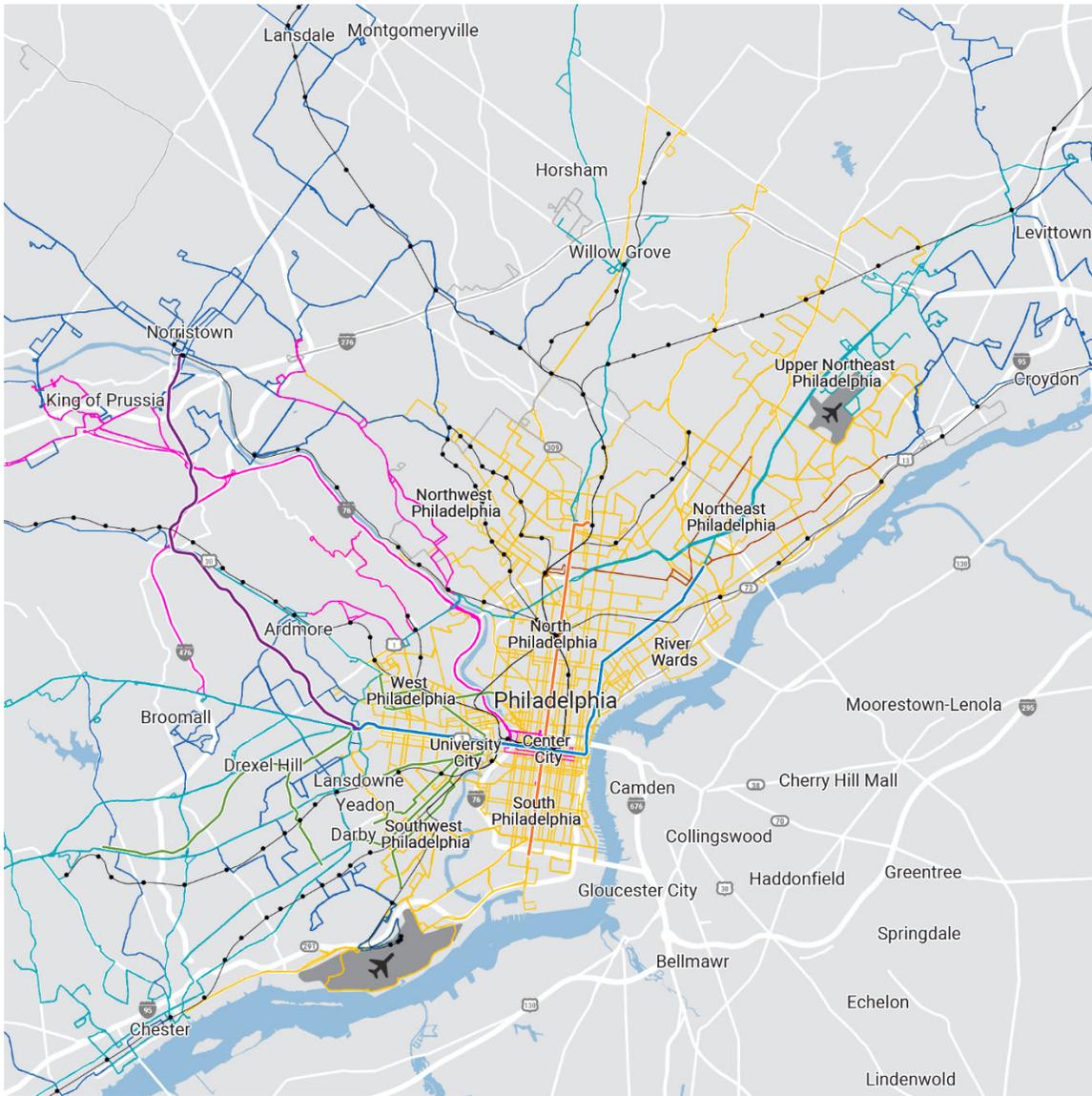
## PROJECT BACKGROUND

For public communications purposes, it is important to make clear **what the project study is and what it is not**. This project is a bus network redesign. It includes such elements as studying where SEPTA buses go across the region, which streets they run on, how frequent they are, where buses stop (including the distance/spacing between stops), and how people use bus routes together as a network, leveraging free transfers. Though issues such as individual rider safety, security and cleanliness have proven to be important to riders, they are not the focus of the CBNR project.

The project's **geographical scope** includes the entire SEPTA service area, including the City of Philadelphia – which is served by over 100 routes – and suburban locations in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery County (see Figure 1). It also includes, to a much smaller extent, areas in Mercer County, NJ and New Castle County, DE.

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**Figure 1: SEPTA's Bus Service and Service Area**



**Transit Service Categories**

SEPTA Bus Service	Other SEPTA Service	Bus Revolution
<span style="color: lightblue;">—</span> Arterial	<span style="color: black;">—●—</span> SEPTA Rail	
<span style="color: yellow;">—</span> City	<span style="color: blue;">—</span> Market-Frankford Line	
<span style="color: pink;">—</span> Expressway	<span style="color: orange;">—</span> Broad Street Line	
<span style="color: orange;">—</span> Fixed	<span style="color: green;">—</span> SEPTA Trolley	
<span style="color: darkblue;">—</span> Suburban	<span style="color: purple;">—</span> Norristown High Speed Line	
<span style="color: grey;">—</span> Other		

Data Sources: SEPTA

## PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is crucial and necessary to the success of this project, not an option nor an afterthought. Understanding local needs and desires is fundamental to creating a bus network that works for everyone. We have designed a comprehensive and inclusive Community Engagement Plan that respects communities and residents, builds and strengthens relationships with riders, elected officials, and other stakeholders. From the study/project start through its finish, we will strive for robust outreach and engagement with the community. Our “Rules of Engagement” that follow represent the community-engagement principles that we will apply:

1. We recognize that not all Bus Revolution implementation choices will be supported by everyone, but we resolve to execute an outreach and community-engagement process that is fair, equitable and accessible, where all impacted will feel that they have had a chance to be heard. Our goal is to have the resulting network earn broad support because of thorough outreach that addresses as many concerns as possible, while also maintaining SEPTA’s overall vision and desired outcomes.
2. We want to make sure that as many people as possible in SEPTA’s service area know about the CBNR and understand why it is needed and is currently happening.
3. Engagement is a two-way process. We will inform and educate stakeholders about the project and seek input from them regarding the key issues and concerns that the project must address. Many aspects of the CBNR engagement strategies will provide SEPTA with approaches and resources that can remain part of the organization’s standard operating procedures for informing and listening to stakeholders and customers about service changes and additions.
4. Ensure equity in the community-engagement design, process, findings, and recommendations. The COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide protests against police brutality, an unfair criminal justice system and institutional racism during the last year have brought increased attention to issues of equity and justice. Beyond the statutory obligations of Title VI regulations, equity is at the center of CBNR. When most of the bus riders are people of color, of lower socioeconomic status and depend on public transportation to get to and from the jobs that provide their livelihood, issues of equity and fairness are inextricably linked to the planning and implementation of the redesign. These are the questions we will ask...Who is being impacted? Who will benefit? How does that align with the future of the region economically and beyond?
5. Use a customized engagement process that is tailored to meet the context, complexities and information needs of specific populations in the region.
6. We will encourage people from all regions served by SEPTA’s bus network to contribute their ideas, questions, comments, and concerns about bus transportation. We want to understand their experiences traveling on SEPTA buses, and how they think those experiences can be made better.
7. Engage people “where they are” on many levels—physically, and according to their capacity to absorb information and provide input. This commitment includes conducting engagement activities at flexible times that are convenient for the

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- community members and stakeholders. We will schedule engagements that recognize the many responsibilities of working parents, the working shifts of essential employees who operate outside of the weekday, 9-5 schedule. Bus riders who need to travel in the early morning or late-night hours or primarily on the weekends must be part of the conversation about delivering predictable and reliable service, in a well-thought-out and connected bus network.
8. Build continuous and varied opportunities for input, both online and offline/in-person. We recognize the need to account for a significant digital divide, a range of literacy levels in our region and an increasing number of people for whom English is a second language. While we can harness the power of the internet to broaden communication with the public and get their involvement, we also recognize that there are many residents who do not have equal, ongoing access to computers, broadband Internet access, smartphones, and social media platforms.
  9. Operate with transparency. We will establish frequent and ongoing public access, with clear entry points for participation and input throughout all phases of the project. Provide clear and regular project updates, including schedule information. Be open about challenges and tradeoffs.
  10. Everyone's experiences are relevant to this process, so be inclusive. Throughout this project, we will engage diverse audiences, across neighborhoods, geographical boundaries, ages, races/ethnicities and lived experiences. We will demonstrate that we value all voices. We have created an open, two-way process that ensures a productive dialogue, not just with current, past, and potential bus riders, but also with the general public.

## PLAN SUMMARY

This Plan, which seamlessly integrates with the technical investigation, details the community and public engagement strategies and tactics to fully support the CBNR. It identifies key audiences for engagement, along with the metrics to track, measure and evaluate participation. Elements of the Plan also include an infrastructure to document issues, barriers and concerns associated with the process. Finally, it establishes priority outcomes of the effort, along with how those outcomes can be measured and documented.

## 2 ENGAGEMENT AND SCHEDULE

For each phase of the project, a more detailed “mini-plan” will be developed that offers additional details about timing and specific tactics for each sub-audience. For example, the mini-plans will specify the extent of each of the engagement activities, such as the number of public workshops in each round. Detailed plans will also be developed for key activities, such as stakeholder interviews, project hub identification and coordination, survey distribution and collection, attendance at regularly scheduled CBO meetings, public workshops, and others.

Key Activities*	2021 - Existing Conditions & Goal-Setting			2022 - System Redesign		
	Spring 2021 Project Kickoff & Initial Stakeholder Engagement	Summer 2021 Trade-Offs: Values, Goals, and Priorities	Fall 2021 Network Visioning & Local Community Input on Individual Routes	Winter 2021/2022 Developing Scenarios, Options, and Investments	Spring/Summer 2022 Present Draft Alternative Scenarios to Public	Fall 2022 Revised Redesign, Recommendation, Implementation Next Steps
Stakeholder & Public Engagement Plan	X (Years 1-2)	-	-	-	-	X (Year 3)
Project Launch	"Soft" Launch	"Hard" Launch				
Review of "What We've Heard"	X	-	-	-	-	-
Stakeholder interviews	X	-	-	-	-	-
Fact Sheets (3)	#1: Purpose, Timeline, Public Involvement	-	-	#2: Update for 2022	-	#3: System Redesign Recommendations
Surveys (4) (online & offline)	Review Past/Existing Bus-Related Surveys	#1: Trade-Offs	#2: Design Your Own Transit System	#3: Draft Alternatives	#4: Redesign Recommendations	
Attendance at CBO meetings	-	X	X	X	X	X
Public Workshops	-	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
Project Bus / Pop-Ups	-	X	X	X	X	X
Virtual Public Webinars	-	X	-	X	X	X
Targeted Sessions for Special Audiences	-	X	X	-	X	X
Youth Activations	-	X	-	-	X	X

## 3 KEY ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

### TACTICS: INFORMATION PORTALS

The information sources below form the core architecture that will house the latest information about the CBNR project. They will serve as the “go-to” sources towards which we will point interested stakeholders and members of the public.

#### Website

The project website [www.SEPTAabusrevolution.com](http://www.SEPTAabusrevolution.com), will serve as a core source of information and updates about the ongoing project. This will contain background information, a record of the process and learnings to date, and upcoming opportunities for feedback and participation. Visual, audio, and written forms of core information will be part of the website to ensure accessibility. The website will be used to promote meetings and surveys and to provide a place for questions and comments. Additional updates will be available via the authority’s homepage ([www.septa.org](http://www.septa.org)) and its planning site ([planning.septa.org](http://planning.septa.org)).

#### Physical Project Hubs

Community-based project hubs will be the physical counterparts to the website and will be scheduled (and staffed) around key phases in the projects. Based in neighborhoods, the hubs will allow us to share information such as meeting flyers, fact sheets, and survey forms in a way that bridges the “digital divide” and meets people where they are. There is an option here to create branded hubs as part of key transportation terminals and/or to leverage already-existing community hubs (such as libraries or recreation centers) in all areas of the SEPTA region (e.g., in each City Council district, plus each county served by the bus network).

#### Fact Sheets

Fact Sheets are single-page printable and digital PDFs that can be updated as the project progresses. These will serve as informative documents to go alongside communications with key partners and community nodes, including early in the project in the initial outreach to stakeholder interviewees. The Fact Sheets will include ways that members of the public can get involved, such as: links to the website and online survey; a project hotline phone number; and directions for finding a project community hub.

#### Phone Number with Recordings

We will host a telephone number that anyone can call or text for updates. The telephone line will be staff at certain times of the week with pre-recorded updates available at other times.

## Virtual Transit Talks/Webinars

Even as public-gathering restrictions ease, virtual meetings will continue to play a useful role in conveniently reaching many people in their homes. During each phase, or as appropriate, a recorded video presentation will be streamed live, or shared pre-recorded, to provide context and educational content. As the project progresses, a library of these webinars will be recorded and updated as an accessible resource for those looking to learn more about the project on-demand, at any time.

## TACTICS: GETTING INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

The following list identifies a range of strategies for getting the core project information (using the Consistently Updated Information Sources detailed in the previous section) out to stakeholders and the general public.

### Community Ambassadors

Community members can act as “ambassadors” for the project and help spread the word in their neighborhoods about ways to stay updated on and get involved in the project. This may include attendance at community events or meetings, and distributing materials such as meeting flyers, fact sheets, and surveys through their existing neighborhood contacts.

### Community-Based Partners

Key community-based organizations (CBOs) will be identified in each Philadelphia City Council district and each county served by SEPTA buses. CBOs will be invited to participate in the Bus Revolution as partners in the process. Specific roles include disseminating information through their existing communications channels, hosting listening sessions and facilitating other CBNR-related events.

Building relationships with key partners in all areas of the SEPTA service region will help to garner trust and drive engagement from harder-to-reach and often rightfully distrustful community members.

### Signage and printed materials

Posters that promote the project, with general information and ways to get involved, can be placed in strategic locations, especially (but not limited to) on SEPTA buses and at bus stops. These posters can include: a QR code that links people to the project website and/or the most recent active survey; a phone number for people (especially those with limited internet access) to call; and directions on how to find your local community Project Hub(s).

### Social media

Social media can be leveraged to reach people at-scale. Key partners with relevant/active social media can share our core information (visually, written, video) to reach their networks. Moreover, these posts can be promoted and targeted to reach both

wider and/or more specific audiences. Note that our social media will also be leveraged as a key tool to collect information *from* the public, through comments posted on the sites.

## Email Updates

Emails with key updates and information about the Bus Revolution will be sent out to a stakeholder database that will be developed across key sources. To maintain continuity and focus, these will be project-specific emails, independent of news regarding other initiatives at the transit agency.

## Transit App

The Transit App can be leveraged via notifications to its users to raise awareness about the project and send out surveys.

## Texting App

For those without email, there is potential to use a texting application to enable texting at scale with key updates. Phone numbers (and consent) would need to be gathered, particularly in the first stage of the engagement process, to enable this.

## Local media

To reach the public at-large, local media can be leveraged, from the citywide/county level all the way to a hyperlocal level. Media outlets can range from radio to tv to newsletters and more.

## TACTICS: GATHERING INPUT FROM THE PUBLIC

The following list identifies methods for gathering input from the public and promote two-way information sharing. The goal is to make it easy for people to participate – to truly meet people where they are via multi-stream approaches. The best-fit methods will be further shaped per phase throughout the process. There will be intentional opportunities for iteration based on stakeholder feedback.

## Review of Recent Feedback: “What We’ve Heard”

At the beginning of the project, prior to gathering new input, it is critical to review the input that stakeholders and members of the public have already provided. For example, SEPTA currently maintains an archive of online survey results on its website and has an active COVID survey via which people are already providing feedback on certain aspects of the bus network’s future. The SEPTA CBNR site also has an active online comment box that preceded the kickoff of this project. This review of “What We’ve Heard” will be documented and presented in: a database with links, for use by the internal project team; a memo for SEPTA review; and summary slides, to be incorporated into stakeholder and public project presentations.

## Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews enable the gathering of deeper insights from key decisionmakers, influencers, and representative bodies. The interviews can take place as one-on-one or group sessions. Interviews would begin at the launch / pre-launch phase in order to enable these voices to contribute to the further shaping of the engagement plan. We will also conduct interviews at key moments throughout the process. We will follow up with stakeholders who participated in the interview process throughout the CBNR. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and for convenience, it is anticipated that these early interviews would be conducted virtually.

## Surveys

Surveys will be a core way to gather information and ideas from the public. However, it is critical to ensure that each set of surveys is equitable in reach and accessibility. To do this, we will augment online surveys with other methods, such as: print-out (hard-copy) surveys at key community nodes; options to call-in or text in survey responses; intercept surveys via Community Ambassadors; and creative pop-ups or potentially Project Bus at community events. In addition to reviewing existing surveys (including the ongoing COVID survey), we anticipate four surveys that will be used to shape the redesign efforts in Years 1 and 2:

- a. Trade-offs (Summer 2021)
- b. Design Your Own Transit System (Fall 2021)
- c. Draft Alternatives (Spring 2022)
- d. Redesign Recommendations (Fall 2022)

## CBO Meetings

To meet people where they are and build trust in the process, appearances at regularly scheduled CBO meetings in each Council district and county are highly suggested. It is anticipated that a representative(s) of the core project team would attend the first set of meetings, and in subsequent phases, could provide core information to CBO heads, who would likely be our community-based partners by then. In addition to getting information to the public, questions and comments would be welcome.

## Public Meetings, Workshops, or Open Houses

At different stages over the course of the project, public meetings will be held throughout SEPTA service area. These meetings will be creative, enjoyable, safe, and engaging experiences and for participants of all ages and backgrounds. They can provide value and entertainment, while also incorporating insight-gathering activities and deeper discussions. To ensure that the voices of SEPTA riders – many of whom live outside Center City – are reflected prominently in this project, public meetings should be held in bus-reliant neighborhoods outside Center City, where digital access is more limited.

While elements of each public meeting will be tailored to the particular community in which it is being held (e.g., language translation needs, digital access needs, and an

emphasis on the individual local routes of which participants have the most knowledge), the content of the meeting will remain generally consistent within each project phase.

The following phases are anticipated for this project in Years 1 & 2:

- a. Summer 2021: Trade-Offs: Values, Goals, and Priorities
- b. Fall 2021: Network Visioning & Local Community Input on Individual Routes
- c. Winter 2021/2022: Developing Scenarios, Options, and Investments
- d. Spring/Summer 2022: Present Draft Alternative Scenarios to Public
- e. Fall 2022: Revised Redesign, Recommendations, Implementation Next Steps

The number of meetings and format for each will be finalized prior to the start of each phase.

## Project Bus / Pop-Ups

The Project Bus would be a branded bus, developed for the project, that can be brought to multiple community events at key junctures. The bus would act as an anchor for a “pop-up” at already-existing events. It would allow us to provide key information directly to the public and can incorporate key insight-gathering tactics such as the surveys as well as additional interactive, game-based tactics. In instances where a Project Bus is not available, a table can be set up with staff and project materials (flyers, fact sheets, surveys, etc.) at street fairs and other community events, or in key nodes such as transit terminals throughout the City. Pop-ups will be designed to include activities and giveaways (puzzles, coloring books, toys, etc.) for children. This will increase the likelihood that parents will stop to take a few minutes to complete surveys, since their children are being engaged and entertained.

## Targeted Sessions for Special Audiences

It is important to ensure that often overlooked voices are being heard; the project will look for opportunities to hold target sessions with special audiences. These will be focus-group-like, invitational sessions to provide a smaller, safe space that will be tailored to certain audiences. Potential coordinating partners for these sessions include organizations such as the African American Chamber of Commerce, organizations advocating for people with disabilities, the Welcoming Center, and others.

## Youth Activations

One of the goals of the Project Bus/Pop-Ups tactic is to meet people – including youth – where they are. It may be worth considering a specific partnership with the School District(s) to develop an activity that can be incorporated into classes and be a direct way to gather more insights from young people. In addition, we will engage members of SEPTA’s Youth Advisory Council as a resource for gathering information.

## **Multimedia Commenting**

In addition to being inclusive across audiences, public commenting opportunities should be exciting! New interactive technologies that could be used to generate public input are constantly evolving. Depending on the project phase and the input desired, such tactics could be employed at Public Meetings, Project Bus/Pop-Ups, or hosted online.

## **Ongoing SEPTA CBNR Online Comment Box**

The currently active SEPTA CBNR online comment box should continue to be used and monitored throughout the course of the project.

## 4 ENGAGING A FULL RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS

Everyone who resides, works, and travels within Southeastern Pennsylvania should be considered a stakeholder of SEPTA and its CBNR. The elected officials who represent them are key stakeholders. Communicating effectively with these audiences—both listening and talking to them—is critically important to project success. Our inclusive engagement process reflects a commitment to go far beyond baseline compliance with the requirements of the Title VI program. Stakeholders may be categorized as follows:

- Bus riders: COVID and pre-COVID; and regular, occasional, and potential
- Elected officials and other government stakeholders
- Community-based organizations (CBOs), including registered community organizations (RCOs), other neighborhood and community associations, faith-based institutions, and service organizations with clients who are regular bus riders
- Employers (large and small) of workers who use buses to get to/from work
- Media/Press/Influencers, including talk and ethnic radio stations, and online and paper publications
- Business community interest groups, including Chambers of Commerce, Business Associations, and others
- SEPTA internal stakeholders, including staff, management, Board members, CAC, YAC and SAC committee members
- Regional transportation-focused organizations, such as COMTO, DVRPC, WTS, etc.
- Transit advocacy groups
- Traditional and new partners for transit, such as schools, universities, hospitals, the airport, and community centers such as libraries and recreation centers that could serve as project hubs

In addition to the above stakeholders, it is important to develop tactics can engage certain special audiences, including those that can often be more difficult to reach. Specific tactics for each of these sub-audiences will be reflected in a series of engagement “mini-plans” being developed by the project team:

- Students who use SEPTA to get back and forth to school/activities
- Women, who make up the majority of SEPTA’s bus riders
- People with disabilities and the organizations that represent them. We will hold public meetings only in ADA-compliant spaces, with sign language interpreters and materials prepared in large-print and Braille versions, as appropriate.
- Senior citizens, especially those with accessibility issues, both in terms of mobility and digital literacy
- Non-native English speakers/multilingual residents/residents with limited English proficiency. Given that many non-English speaking residents use SEPTA as their

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- primary form of transportation, we will include access to multilingual resources. Community meeting materials and live translation (as resources allow) will be translated into different languages.
- Historically underserved and under-represented populations, including LGBTQ, Latinx, African Diaspora populations, and residents with low socioeconomic status. In order to engage these audiences effectively, we will pro-actively ask them how they prefer to be reached, the best ways to communicate with them regularly and whether there are any barriers that need to be addressed. These inquiries will start in our initial outreach meetings and continue throughout the project. We will incorporate what we learn, continuing to refine and enhance our engagement plan.
  - Emerging new American communities.

## 5 MONITORING, TRACKING AND REPORTING (OUTCOMES AND MEASURES)

The project team will monitor, track, measure and report on outputs and outcomes of the engagement and communications tactics. Outputs are defined as “counting,” i.e., how many or much of something takes place. Outcomes, on the other hand, are assessments of how participation in community-engagement efforts affected the project. On a regular basis, we will provide outputs for each tactic and communications channel deployed. Outcomes will be reported after each project phase. Both qualitative and quantitative measures will be reported.

By monitoring and tracking our activities, we will have the information we need to make continual adjustments, as needed, to improve outreach, encourage participation, respond to community issues/concerns, and deliver information about the CBNR. The qualitative and quantitative information we gather from the community will be used to adjust our project engagement approach and to contribute over time to strategic CBNR planning.

A reporting infrastructure will be developed and refined to capture and share community feedback on the process and on major aspects of the project. A summary report in the form of a project dashboard will be explored and presented to the SEPTA Communications Team. We will also provide detailed, written records of public feedback to SEPTA for every meeting we conduct and from every other touchpoint we have with the stakeholders during engagement activities. All comments, positive and negative, will be captured, so they can be documented, analyzed, and used to contribute to meaningful decisions. Data analysis and reporting will include:

- Web and social media analytics (numbers and comments from public)
- Demographic analysis of survey data and other information-gathering tools
- Summary of formal and informal community engagement activities undertaken
- Summary of non-digital engagement and results
- Takeaways/Recommendations

It is expected that the documentation of the measurements and reporting formats may be used by SEPTA on other projects and well beyond the Bus Revolution.