

CHAPTER III

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

In the first month of the Connect Central Virginia 2045 process, CVTPO's consultants developed a Public Involvement Plan to guide public and stakeholder engagement activities. This charter document was consistent with the TPO's Public Participation Plan (PPP) and Title VI Plan to uphold TPO policies and federal requirements. This engagement plan entailed detailed goals, strategies, and documentation of results. Despite the COVID 19 pandemic, which interfered with in-person strategies, the 2045 process surpassed the 2040 LRTP and RL RTP processes in terms of number of comments collected and resources spent on public involvement. This chapter describes the engagement process, which spanned 15 months, while the attached appendix documents all comments received.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GOALS

Five engagement goals guided Connect Central Virginia 2045 involvement with the public and stakeholders. The TPO adopted an engagement process, designed to accomplish these goals. Each engagement strategy accomplished at least one goal. Each stage of the planning process emphasized one or more goals at a time based on the need for primary data collection from engagement.

GOAL A: EDUCATE AND INFORM

This goal applied to all phases of the planning process. Throughout the 2045 update, there was an emphasis on communicating the importance of the LRTP portion of the plan. Main engagement strategies included the project website: <https://www.connectcentralvirginia2045.com>, newsletter materials, press releases, and public intercepts.

GOAL B: NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the initial phases of the process, engagement strategies were intended to identify transportation needs and opportunities. This engagement is comprised of more open-ended questions to identify areas of concern and perceived transportation deficiencies. One objective was to attain a local knowledge of the community and its transportation system. Engagement tools included a comments page on the 2045 website: <https://www.connectcentralvirginia2045.com>, public intercepts, an online survey, and interviews with stakeholders.

GOAL C: GOALS AND MEASURES

In the second phase of the Connect Central Virginia 2045 process, public and stakeholder involvement helped to determine a system of goals and performance measures to evaluate projects for the Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP). Engagement tools included an online survey and public intercept strategies.

GOAL D: PROJECT SELECTION

In the next phase, the TPO evaluated new and existing transportation recommendations with the approved set of performance measures. Public engagement focused on collecting feedback on the prioritized list of recommendations. Engagement tools included online comment options on the site: <https://www.connectcentralvirginia2045.com>, a virtual town hall, and a final round of review with TPO and local officials.

GOAL E: DRAFT AND FINAL PLAN

The TPO posted draft versions of the plan at public locations and online. Review of the plan included a public hearing at the September 2020 meeting.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Per the TPO's PPP and Federal Code, the 2045 process involved a diverse assortment of engagement strategies. The TPO's consultants tailored these approaches to the needs of each stage in the process and to the defined engagement goals.

TPO MEETINGS

Two TPO bodies participated throughout the process, guiding the update and deliverables. The Transportation Technical Committee (TTC) provided technical feedback during the process, while the TPO Policy Board focused on policy-related items. Results from these activities are documented below and in Appendix D.

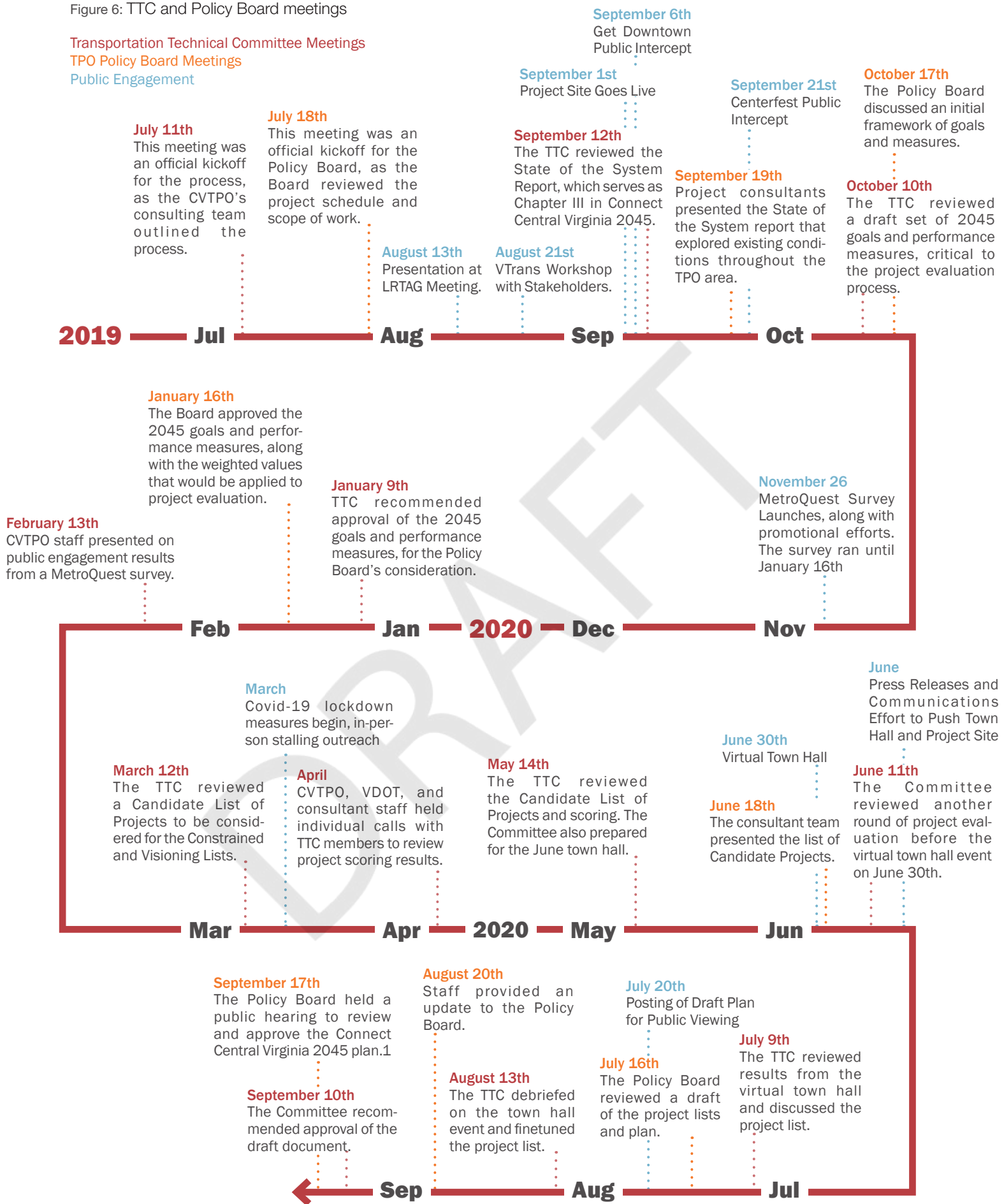
Transportation Technical Committee:

CVTPO formed the TTC to provide technical engineering and planning expertise in regional planning processes. TTC membership is comprised of staff-level officials of local, state, and federal agencies. In addition, the technical committee includes representatives of interest groups, various transportation modes, and local citizens. Their meeting schedule included the following topics. Each meeting allowed for public comment periods.



Figure 6: TTC and Policy Board meetings

Transportation Technical Committee Meetings
TPO Policy Board Meetings
Public Engagement



TPO Policy Board:

The TPO Policy Board consists of local and state officials and serves as the governing body of the CVTPO. This body reviewed policy aspects of the process and holds decision-making power for adoption of the plan. Each TPO Policy Board meeting includes a public comment period. **Figure 6** shows the schedule of TTC and TPO Policy Board meetings throughout the planning process.

PROJECT WEBSITE

The TPO's consultants developed a project website (<https://www.connectcentralvirginia2045.com>) that provided information on the 2045 process. The website included a public comment box to allow for general comments online. In later stages of the 2045 update, the website offered further review of

the draft list of projects and the draft plan. On June 30th, 2020 the TPO hosted a virtual town hall from the site with a webinar and call-in format.

NEWSLETTERS AND PRESS RELEASES

Staff shared project information in TPO newsletters and press releases. These notices included staff phone numbers and addresses that allowed the public to forward comments to the TPO. The Public Participation Plan, guided language used in newsletters and press releases.

SURVEYS

VDOT hosted a MetroQuest survey for the process. CVTPO staff took an aggressive outreach effort to collect comments on the survey. Approximately 1,000 individuals responded to the survey, providing nearly 2,000 map markers for the online mapping



exercise identifying perceived transportation deficiencies. CVTPO's consultants created heatmaps that represented comments. Overlaid with the project list, the comments helped to validate project selection and identification of future studies.

PUBLIC INTERCEPTS

The TPO's consultants planned a series of public intercept events that displayed 2045 materials at existing community events such as festivals and other public gatherings. Consultants set up a booth at the Get Downtown Festival on September 6, 2019 and Centerfest on September 21, 2019. EPR, P.C. engaged approximately 300 people during these efforts. In 2020, the TPO began preparations for a new series of intercepts but those plans had to be reconsidered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the public intercepts, there was engagement with stakeholders at workshops. On August 13th, 2019 CVTPO staff and their consultants presented at an LRTAG meeting. Participants engaged in an exercise that helped to determine mode priorities and goals. On August 21st, 2019 CVTPO's consultants (EPR, P.C.) facilitated a stakeholder workshop as part of the state's VTrans update, Virginia's Statewide Surface Transportation Plan. In this workshop stakeholders provided comments that would contribute to the 2045 effort.

VIRTUAL TOWN HALL

The TPO hosted a virtual town hall event on June 30, 2020 to present the draft list of projects and plan elements. This event included a call-in feature for those that lacked internet access. The local community access channel (LTV) broadcasted the meeting.

LYNCHBURG CONNECTIVITY STUDY INTERVIEWS

The Lynchburg Connectivity Study process involved interviews with stakeholders that are incorporated into this Connect Central Virginia 2045 document. Interviews with various stakeholders in government, the business community, and the transportation sector itself helped establish factors of economic success, the overall role of transportation, and constraints on growth. Interview findings also illuminate the importance of non-transportation connectivity, including the availability of

communications infrastructure and the social and institutional connections that help cultivate a strong workforce. Each interview was organized into two parts, the first focused on current operations and connectivity conditions, and the second targeted emerging issues.

PUBLIC VIEWING

Prior to adoption, the TPO posted electronic and physical copies of the plan at least 30 days prior to the public hearing. Notices for public viewing complied with the TPO's Public Participation Plan.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The 2045 engagement process called for public intercepts and public open house events. The TPO's consultants (EPR, P.C.) began to prepare public intercept materials for spring and summer events, including the very well attended "Celebrate America" event hosted by Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty University. The original engagement plan called for two public open house events, which would also serve to meet FHWA requirements for at least one public meeting. In March, just as TPO staff and consultants prepared to ramp up engagement efforts, the COVID-19 pandemic led to cancellations of public gatherings and resulted in social distancing protocols across the nation. The June 30th, 2020 virtual town hall responded to social distancing requirements and met the FHWA requirement as a "public meeting."

DOCUMENTATION

Staff tracked all public engagement efforts and comments throughout the 2045 process in a matrix of comments that records feedback from the public and stakeholders. Appendix E also details results from the survey, town hall, VTrans workshop and all other engagement efforts.



MATRIX OF PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

The matrix consists of six columns that record the following:

Comment ID

Each public and stakeholder comment received a numeric ID for easy reference.

Name

The Matrix recorded the name of the individual who made the comment. If the individual did not include a name or asked for his/her name to be excluded from the record, staff recoded those entries as anonymous. Most comments fell under this category.

Comment

Connect Central Virginia 2045 records every comment received in this process. These comments are direct quotes unless otherwise noted.

Source

The Matrix recorded the source for each comment. Sources include the various strategies and platforms for engagement, such as the town hall, website, workshops, etc.

How was this addressed

The final column records how the plan addressed each comment. Some comments directly influenced the structure of this plan. Other comments helped validate project selection. Others were considered but did not directly influence the process due to various reasons that are listed.

THEMES OF ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

There were core themes that arose from the engagement process. First, responses tended to focus on bike and pedestrian amenities. Most comments from the online survey focused on the downtown area. Throughout workshops and public intercepts, participants consistently commented on providing more resources towards bike and pedestrian capital investments.

Safety was another concern in the MetroQuest survey, public intercepts, and workshops. While congestion was less of a concern throughout the process, participants identified safety concerns in specific areas of the region.

In response to the two main themes identified above, the 2045 process contains the following features:

OVERLAY OF COMMENTS WITH PROJECTS

The 2045 process overlays projects with maps of comments to validate project selection. In development of the Constrained List of Projects, this exercise helped to determine inclusion of projects on the margin for inclusion.

BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

Inclusion of Bike and Pedestrian Features

For all transportation projects listed in the Constrained and Visioning lists, the consultant team determined if there were any bike and pedestrian improvements included in the project descriptions. The project scoring process consisted of 16 performance measures, including a measure for alternative forms of transportation. This methodology awarded points to all LRTP projects that included these features.

SAFETY

Project Scoring

The 2045 process emphasized safety in the project evaluation process. See [Chapter VII](#) for additional information.

Future Study

The process identified safety deficiencies that have not been studied, to date. The 2045 process includes a list of safety-related deficiencies to be studied further to develop future LRTP projects.



Figure 7: Heatmap that illustrates concentrations of safety-related comments from the MetroQuest survey.

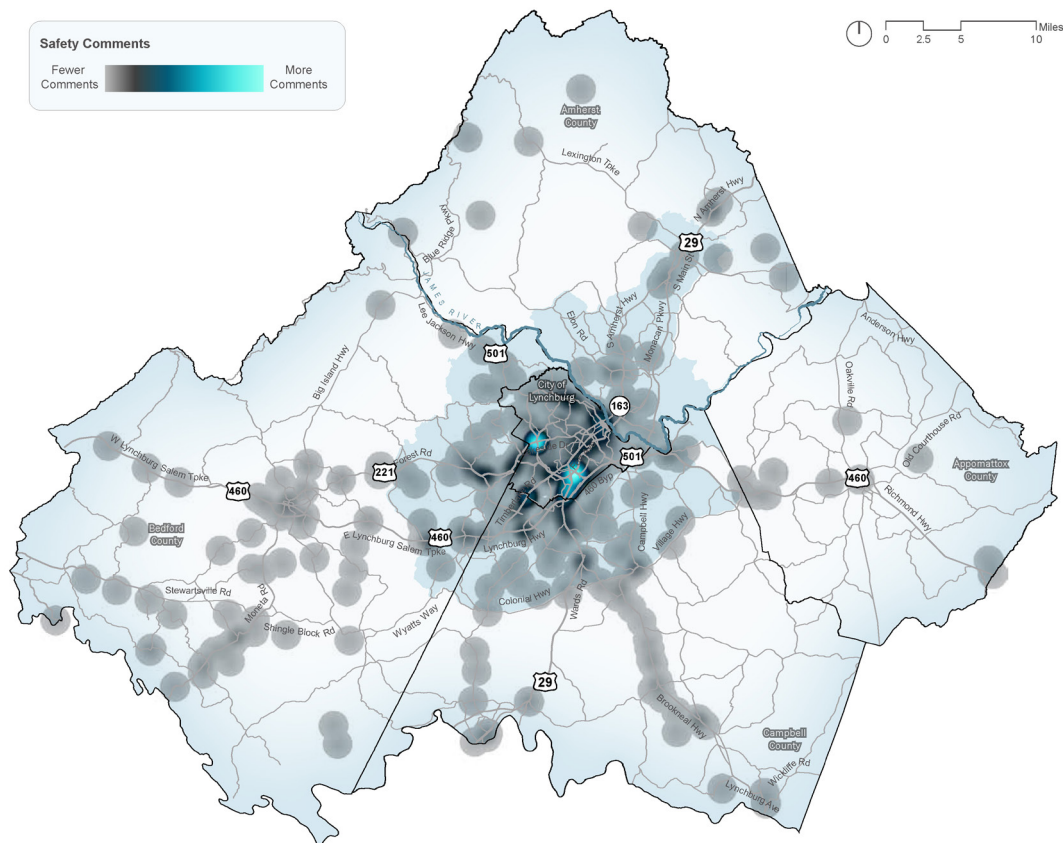


Figure 8: A heatmap that highlights comments from the MetroQuest survey, regarding bike and pedestrian comments.

