



NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF MPOs PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

February 29, 2024

Virtual

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

MEETING NOTES

Participating

- BMTS – Brian Cohen
- BMTS – Leigh McCullen
- CRTIC – Stephen Maples
- DCTC - Emily Dozier
- DCTC – Tara Grogan
- ECTC - Courtney Taylor
- GBNRTC – Angelica Gonzalez
- GTC – Lori Maher
- HOCTC – Adam Palmer
- NYMTC - Stephanie Brooks
- NYMTC – Sherry Southe
- NYMTC – Rossana Weitekamp
- WJCTC - Jennifer Docteur
- FHWA - Kaylie Kramer
- Planning4Places – Kathy Ember

1. Introductions

Lori Maher summarized the agenda for today’s meeting. Meeting notes were approved for the December 20, 2023, meeting with no changes.

2. Plain Language: Make it Clear Examples

- Lori Maher discussed the Center for Plain Language and discussed how to write content in plain language – keep it short and to the point, set a helpful tone, and pick the right words. Lori shared an example, and the group shared their suggestions in the chat to rephrase the example in plain language. Kaylie Kramer mentioned that it is helpful to use the average reading level as a guide.

3. Discussion of *Inclusive Transportation*

- Angelica Gonzalez came across this book and was thinking about community engagement and connecting with communities. Angelica was not in the transportation field previously and felt that 75% of the book was about community engagement. She also noted that it’s Black History Month. Angelica discussed the Kensington Expressway project in Buffalo (DOT is leading the effort). This neighborhood is a redlined community and there is a lot of mistrust of officials and the community feels unheard. Angelica provided an overview of Veronica Davis’ work and her book. One of the main questions in the book is how you repair a system that continues to divide people. The book discusses what equity justice and mobility justice looks like. Angelica asked the group to define equity.

- Adam Palmer thinks about income equity – lower income communities needing access to higher paying jobs. He noted that an example is a new chip plant that is not accessible for lower income communities to get there.
- Tara Grogan stated it is about the types of mobility that are prioritized. In Poughkeepsie, we prioritize 3-lane roads that go through neighborhoods. If you adjust it, commuters get upset but people living there cannot cross the street.
- Stephen Maples noted that for the Capital Region there is income and race disparity where people live and there are barriers to where those jobs are and affordable housing near those jobs. It feels like larger issues are landing at the plate of transportation planners (particularly land use patterns).
- Lori Maher asked Adam if there was discussion about where the chip plant went. The group discussed how to steer development to certain locations and a lot of development choices are not done through a transportation planning perspective (it's more developer driven). There is only so much steering development to certain locations. Stephen Maples shared about a program for underserved individuals on a Saturday where there is not transit available.
- Angelica Gonzalez described that the book discusses transportation happening during the Jim Crow era. A lot of the American Dream is deciding individually where you want to live, and it is hard to break that pattern.
- Tara Grogan noted that in terms of disadvantaged areas it is hard to help them when they have had a negative experience with government. The challenge is getting individuals to trust government and come to the table.
- Angelica Gonzalez asked the group what we can do to get them to trust us and asked that the group shares success stories.
- Stephen Maples noted that they rarely do stand-alone meetings and favor going to community groups or existing events or pop-ups at bus stops. Hopefully over time, which will result in more trust.
- Adam Palmer shared that the County and MPO is combined and so going to other meetings such as going to health-related meetings opens up the audience to invite health stakeholders to transportation meetings.
- Lori Maher noted that we are conveners as MPOs. Lori asked who public engagement specialists and the Working Group members shared their backgrounds - most of the WG members are planners who also do public outreach as a part of their projects.
- Emily Dozier noted part of being inclusive is not using acronyms and even how we dress helps be more approachable. Angelica Gonzalez agreed that not speaking in acronyms and using plain language on social media is important.
- Kaylie Kramer shared that she has heard during different projects such as I-81, Kensington, etc. where people are asking why the funding is spent here. They then have to state the money for the project is already allocated and they cannot change the project funding to build affordable housing for example. So then the response needs to be that if you are concerned about low-income housing that can be looked at through other planning efforts. Kaylie stated the key to earning trust is continuing to show up and helping where we can.
- Angelica Gonzalez agrees that the Kensington project is mentioned a lot – people don't know what they don't know. Explaining what we can do is helpful for people.
- Angelica Gonzalez talked about four key principles in the book– the engagement team is not included in the technical process, the transportation team needs to know

what to do, planners are not always trained in engagement, and sometimes the government is afraid of the public.

- Tara Grogan agreed that training in the skills for how to talk with the public would be helpful as well as facilitation techniques would be useful too. The Working Group agreed this would be a worthwhile training.

4. Meeting Schedule

- In-Person Meeting Location, Date, Topics
 - Lori Maher stated that we received some feedback about travel being hard and asked the group if they want to meet in-person. Emily Dozier suggested perhaps getting together for facilitation training or meeting at an existing conference might be an idea.
- 2024 Meeting Dates
 - Lori Maher highlighted the upcoming meeting dates of April 22nd, June 17th, August 22nd, October 24th, and December 19th.

5. Other Topics

- Continued Discussion on Public Engagement for Regional Safety Plans (SS4A)
 - Lori Maher asked if there is anything new in everyone's MPOs regarding public engagement for the regional safety plans. Stephen Maples shared that they had their kick-off meeting. He noted that CRTC's regional operations and safety committee members are on the Study Advisory Committee meeting and the next step is developing the public engagement plan. Tara Grogan noted that DCTC will be releasing an RFP for a Safety Action Plan. One question they are considering is what the public outreach effort looks like. Angelica Gonzalez noted that GBNRTC has the PPP developed and there have been a few meetings held.
- Adobe and Canva Training
 - Lori Maher mentioned deadline has passed. Kathy will share training updates when available. Emily Dozier asked the members about the free Canva training. Stephen Maples reviewed the offerings for CRTC. Lori Maher recommends using the Canva Pro version and you can request the free offer for Pro and GTC was successful in securing it for free. Lori Maher can share how she applied for non-profit status. Stephen Maples is looking into applying as well for CRTC.
- Public Engagement Working Group Program Update
 - Kathy Ember shared that the draft 2024-2025 Work Program is being reviewed by the Directors Group. No changes were made to the Public Engagement Working Group submission. Comments are due back from the Directors on March 5th and the draft final version is tentatively scheduled to be discussed at the March 15th meeting. The Work Program takes effect on April 1st. Lori Maher thanked the Working Group for their help on the Work Program.
- Public Engagement Working Group Program Webpage
 - Kathy Ember shared the Public Engagement Working Group webpage. This is currently live but will be linked from the main pages soon.

6. High Five/Share a Tip

- Lori Maher opened the floor for the group to share efforts underway.
- Stephen Maples noted that CRTC is about to adopt their PPP.

- Emily Dozier shared that DCTC met with some new elected officials and DCTC staff found that it was useful to introduce the MPO and share what the MPO does with the new officials. Lori Maher has been thinking of doing a welcome kit for newly elected officials.
- Tara Grogan shared this document that DCTC prepared:
https://www.dutchessny.gov/Departments/Transportation-Council/Graphics/DCTC_Poster.pdf
- Rossana Weitekamp noted that related to plain language, NYMTC used plain language in its Annual Report. She will send it around when it is on the website.
- Lori Maher shared that the National Association of Government Communicators organization is a useful resource.

7. Next Steps

- Lori Maher reminded the Working Group about the [Google Drive](#) and [Wix Forum](#). Emily Dozier asked if we could share other resources on the Public Engagement webpage rather than having the Google Drive.
- Lori Maher suggested that we discuss the Eclipse event at the next meeting.