



Public Participation Plan

Adopted January 17, 2024

American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Information

Persons with disabilities needing special accommodations may request written materials in alternate formats, sign language interpreters, physical accessibility accommodations, or other reasonable accommodations by contacting WCOG at 360-676-6974, with at least six (6) days advance notice. *Para asistencia en español, por favor enviar un correo electrónico a espanol@wcog.org.*

Title VI Notice to the Public

The Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) hereby gives public notice that it is the policy of the agency to assure full compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, Executive Order 13166 on Limited English Proficiency, and related statutes and regulations in all programs and activities. Title VI requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity for which WCOG receives federal financial assistance.

Any person who believes they have been aggrieved by unlawful discriminatory practice under Title VI has a right to file a formal complaint with WCOG. Any such complaint must be in writing and filed with the WCOG Title VI Coordinator within one hundred eighty (180) days following the date of the alleged discriminatory occurrence. Title VI Discrimination Complaint Forms may be obtained from WCOG at no cost and are available on WCOG's website.

Aviso al Público Sobre Título VI de la Ley de Derechos Civiles de 1964

Por medio de la presente, el WCOG notifica de manera pública que la política del organismo es garantizar el pleno cumplimiento del Título VI de la Ley de Derechos Civiles de 1964, la Ley de Restauración de Derechos Civiles de 1987, el Decreto Ejecutivo 12898 sobre Justicia Ambiental, el Decreto Ejecutivo 13166 sobre el Dominio Limitado del Idioma Inglés, así como los estatutos y reglamentos relacionados en todos los programas y actividades. De acuerdo con lo estipulado en el Título VI, ningún individuo de los Estados Unidos de América deberá, con fundamento en su raza, color o nacionalidad, ser excluido de participar en, que se le nieguen los beneficios de, o ser víctima de discriminación en virtud de cualquier programa o actividad por el cual el WCOG reciba fondos federales.

Toda persona que se considere agraviada por una práctica discriminatoria e ilícita en virtud del Título VI tiene derecho a presentar una denuncia formal ante el WCOG. Cualquier denuncia de este tipo debe presentarse por escrito ante el coordinador del Título VI del WCOG dentro de un plazo de 180 días naturales a partir de la fecha de la presunta discriminación. El WCOG pone a disposición del público los formularios de denuncia del Título VI de manera gratuita en su página web.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Information.....	2
Title VI Notice to the Public.....	2
Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	4
1. INTRODUCTION	5
What is the Whatcom Council of Governments?	5
What is a Metropolitan Planning Organization?.....	5
What is a Regional Transportation Planning Organization?.....	6
What else does WCOG do?	6
What is WCOG’s governance structure?.....	6
2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOALS.....	9
Goals and Strategies.....	9
3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN.....	10
Draft Plan Review and Outreach	10
Guidelines for Public Participation.....	10
4. HOW TO PARTICIPATE	13
WCOG Board Meetings.....	13
Committee Meetings.....	14
Plan Development.....	15
5. ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES	18
Communication.....	18
Outreach Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations.....	19
In-Person Community Engagement	20
Public Participation Activities by Plan or Program.....	21
6. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION.....	22
Summary of Public Outreach Activities	22
Evaluating 2024 – 2027 Engagement Strategies	22

Acronyms and Abbreviations

- CBO Community-Based Organization
- CTAG Community Transportation Advisory Group
- FHWA U.S. Federal Highway Administration
- FTA U.S. Federal Transit Administration
- IMTC International Mobility & Trade Corridor Program
- MPO Metropolitan Planning Organization
- NSTA North Sound Transportation Alliance
- RTP Regional Transportation Plan
- RTPO Regional Transportation Planning Organization
- TIP Transportation Improvement Program
- TTAG Transportation Technical Advisory Group
- USDOT U.S. Department of Transportation
- WCOG Whatcom Council of Governments
- WSDOT WA State Department of Transportation
- WTA Whatcom Transportation Authority

1. INTRODUCTION

As both a user of the regional transportation system in Whatcom County, and as a funder through the various local, state, and federal taxes paid, community members have a say in the planning, development, and management of Whatcom County's transportation network. Public engagement is a critical to the collaboration that produces plans and systems based on the values and priorities of our region's community. Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) has developed this Public Participation Plan to describe how it currently seeks public participation in its planning process and what goals have been set to increase public involvement in its efforts.

What is the Whatcom Council of Governments?

Established in 1966, WCOG provides a forum for cooperation amongst its members which include the Lummi Nation, the seven cities in Whatcom County, Whatcom County government, the Port of Bellingham, and other regional entities. Like most other councils of governments throughout Washington and the United States, WCOG has neither taxing authority nor the ability to regulate land use.

Most of WCOG's programs are focused on coordinating transportation planning between the jurisdictions within and connecting to Whatcom County.

WCOG has been designated the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Bellingham area under federal law, and it has also been designated the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for Whatcom County under state law.

What is a Metropolitan Planning Organization?

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) were created by the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962 to ensure that federal funding for transportation projects is part of a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process. MPOs represent localities in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000 as determined by the U.S. Census.

As Bellingham's MPO, WCOG is responsible for developing a long-range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), currently [Way to Go, Whatcom](#). WCOG is also responsible for developing a near-term regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP provides a comprehensive six-year listing of transportation improvements within the county that are included in the regional transportation system as defined by the region's long-range transportation plan, currently [Way to Go, Whatcom](#). It serves as a schedule of accountability to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), who annually review and certify the TIP to ensure the continuation of federal financial assistance for transportation improvements in the region. WCOG develops the TIP annually

and maintains it throughout the year as projects change, new projects are added, or project phases are removed.

What is a Regional Transportation Planning Organization?

Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) were created by the Washington State's Growth Management Act in 1990 to identify local transportation needs and coordinate the planning process to address those needs in non-metropolitan regions.

As Whatcom County's RTPO, WCOG assists in implementing the Growth Management Act through the certification of local comprehensive plans and the creation of multi-jurisdictional planning policies.

What else does WCOG do?

Important programs administered by WCOG include:

[Unified Planning Work Program \(UPWP\)](#) – A UPWP is required periodically (annually or biennially) of MPOs and RTPOs by state and federal agencies for the purpose of documenting the anticipated uses of federal and state funding for MPO and RTPO activities. While the UPWP's primary purpose is to ensure WCOG is practicing a cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing planning process, it is informative to the public in that it provides useful information about how WCOG activities are funded and how they complement each other to achieve progress toward adopted regional objectives.

[Whatcom Smart Trips](#) – This program helps community members make more of their trips by walking, bicycling, sharing rides or riding the bus.

[The International Mobility and Trade Corridor Program \(IMTC\)](#) – This cross-border forum consists of business and government agencies and works to identify and promote improvements to mobility and security for the Cascade Gateway, the system of border crossings that connect Whatcom County and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

[The North Sound Transportation Alliance \(NSTA\)](#) – This coalition of citizens, elected officials, and agencies works to identify and fund important regional transportation initiatives that improve ways for people to travel through Washington State's five northwestern most counties (Whatcom, Skagit, San Juan, Island, and Snohomish) without a reliance on personal vehicles.

What is WCOG's governance structure?

WCOG has two governing bodies: the Council Board and the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board. All WCOG Board meetings are open to the public, and public comments can be submitted to both either verbally at meetings or in writing.

The Council Board

The Council Board consists of fifteen voting members drawn from Whatcom County's jurisdictions:

- City of Bellingham
- City of Blaine
- City of Everson
- City of Ferndale
- City of Lynden
- City of Nooksack
- City of Sumas
- Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District
- Lummi Nation
- Port of Bellingham
- Whatcom County

There are also associate (non-voting) members who participate in Council Board meetings and share the perspectives of the organizations and communities they represent:

- The Opportunity Council
- Public Utility District No. 1
- Sudden Valley Community Association
- WA State Department of Transportation
- Western Washington University
- Whatcom Transportation Authority

Transportation Policy Board

The Transportation Policy Board oversees the region's transportation planning process and consists of:

- City of Bellingham
- City of Blaine
- City of Everson
- City of Ferndale
- City of Lynden
- City of Nooksack
- City of Sumas
- Lummi Nation
- Nooksack Tribe
- Port of Bellingham
- WA State Department of Transportation
- Whatcom County
- Whatcom Transportation Authority

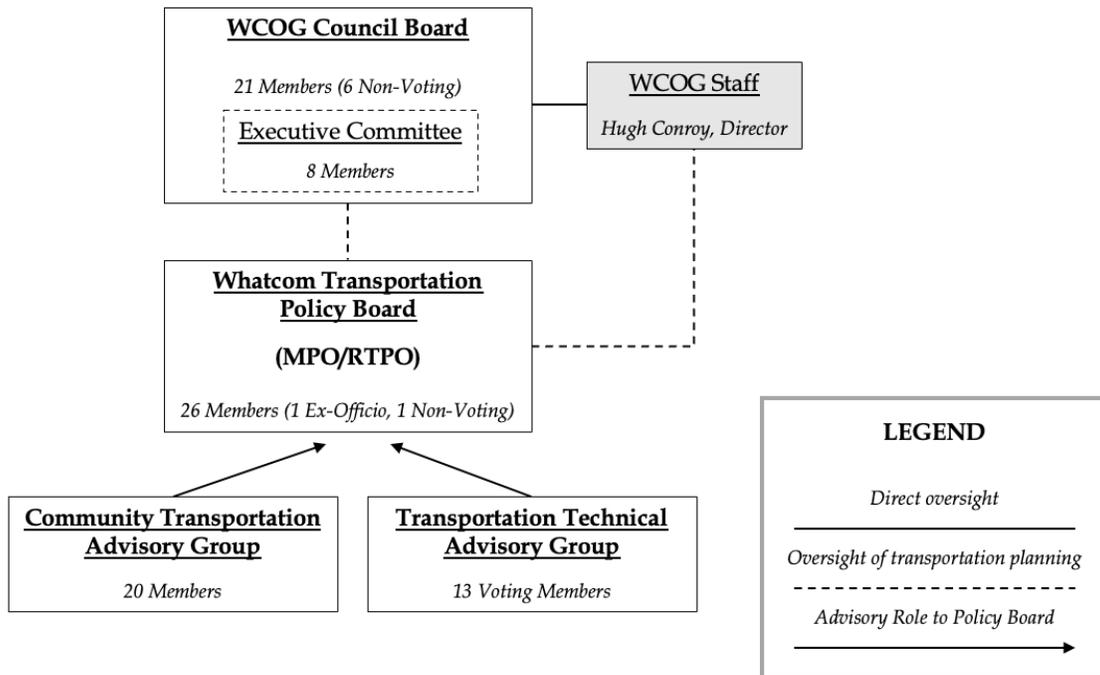
Ex-Officio members of the Transportation Policy Board include:

- Bellingham Technical College
- Public Utility District No. 1
- WA State Legislative Representatives (40th & 42nd District)
- Whatcom Community College
- Western Washington University

Advisory Committees

Advisory committees provide technical assistance and guidance to WCOG’s governing boards on specific issues related to transportation. Because these committees are advisory in nature, they cannot take formal action, nor do they perform functions of a governing body as defined by WA State’s Open Public Meetings Act. WCOG has two standing advisory committees. The Transportation Technical Advisory Group (TTAG) consists of public works and planning staff from member jurisdictions and provides technical input to WCOG’s Boards. The Community Transportation Advisory Group (CTAG) is a forum for community participation in transportation planning decision-making and is jointly administered by WCOG and Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA).

WCOG’s Organizational Structure



2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOALS

Because public policy decisions and transportation projects impact communities and people’s lives, WCOG is committed to transparency and participation by the diversity of interests and people throughout the region in all its efforts. Active public participation is essential to ensure that the transportation planning process reflects the goals of the communities who use and pay for the transportation system. Public processes that hear as many viewpoints as possible are more likely to lead to satisfactory outcomes for the community as a whole.

Goals and Strategies

The following goals have been set for the reporting period of this new Public Participation Plan:

Goals	Strategies for 2024-2026
1. Explain how WCOG approaches public engagement.	1.1 Solicit feedback on this Public Participation Plan through public notice, distribution lists, and online.
2. Increase overall awareness of regional planning processes and how and where the community can inform decision-making.	2.1 A minimum of one presentation to a community-based organization (CBO).
	2.2 A minimum of one outreach effort at a popular gathering place (grocery store, school, event center).
3. Ensure early, continuous, and broad public notification about WCOG’s activities and upcoming decisions.	3.1 Document each form of outreach and, if possible, measure resulting feedback from each effort.
4. Conduct WCOG’s outreach in an equitable and inclusive manner.	4.1 Hold an event in a location that focuses on overburdened communities, including people of color, LGBTQ+, low-income, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and people with limited English proficiency.

Desired Outcomes

The next update of WCOG’s Public Participation Plan will include an evaluation of the above-listed strategies relative to the previous reporting period to determine how effective it was.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

In the fall of 2023, WCOG began updating its Public Participation Plan. This includes revised goals and strategies to increase public engagement for all WCOG’s programs and activities.

Draft Plan Review and Outreach

The Draft Public Participation Plan was distributed for public review and comment in the following ways:

- Presented and shared with CTAG.
- Distributed to relevant email lists and interested parties.
- Posted on WCOG’s website.
- A notice has been posted in the *Bellingham Herald* and *Cascadia Daily News* newspapers.

The public comment period opened November 3, 2023 and closed January 1, 2024. No written feedback was received.

WCOG hosted a virtual Open House on the Title VI Plan and the Public Participation Plan on December 19, 2023 at 6:30PM. Three members of the public attended. Although the feedback received primarily focused on topics not related to these two plans, some of the comments gathered have been incorporated into this final version.

Guidelines for Public Participation

WCOG’s Public Participation Plan has been written with consideration of federal and state requirements. Below are listed the primary laws, regulations, and official guidelines that apply to WCOG regarding public participation.

Federal

- **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law/Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act** of 2021, PL 117-58
- **Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act** of 2015, PL 114-94
- **Americans with Disabilities Act** of 1990, PL 110-325
- **Civil Rights Restoration Act** of 1987, PL 94-135
- **Age Discrimination Act** of 1975, PL 94-135
- **Federal Aid Highway Act** of 1973, PL 93-87, 12 USC 324
- **Rehabilitation Act of 1973**, PL 93-112, Section 504

- **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act** of 1964, PL 88-352
- **Executive Order 12898** – Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations
- **Executive Order 13166** – Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency

Washington State

- **Open Public Meetings Act**, RCW 42.30
- **Growth Management Act**, RCW 36.70A
- **Public Records Act**, RCW 42.56
- **State Environmental Policy Act**, RCW 43.21c

Federal Public Participation Guidelines for MPOs

- Provide adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment.
- Provide timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes.
- Employ visualization techniques, utilizing maps, pictures, and graphics to clearly convey information.
- Make public information available in electronically accessible formats.
- Hold any public meeting at convenient and accessible locations and times.
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received.
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services.
- Periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan to ensure a full and open participation process.
- Coordinate with statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Community outreach is a key component of the Title VI provision which includes requirements to ensure that public agencies like WCOG to solicit and consider the viewpoints of minority and low-income populations in its planning and decision-making activities..

WCOG’s Title VI Plan is being updated in conjunction with this 2024 Public Participation Plan and is also currently open for public input and feedback. This draft is available at <https://wcog.org/titlevi> or upon request by calling (360) 676-6974 or emailing titlevi@wcog.org.

Limited English Proficiency

Executive Order 13166 was signed by President Clinton in 2000 with the objective of improving access to services for those with limited English proficiency (LEP). Providing access for certain LEP individuals to programs, services, and activities is required by law.

5 percent of Whatcom County's population has limited English proficiency, with Spanish being the predominant primary language other than English.

Information about WCOG's Language Assistance Program and available translation and interpretation services is in the [2024 WCOG Title VI Plan](#).

Environmental Justice

Established under Executive Order 12898 in 1994, the fundamental principles of environmental justice are to protect minority and low-income populations from disproportionate adverse health or environmental effects from programs, policies, and activities funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Guidelines are designed to ensure participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and to prevent the denial, reduction, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income families.

Open Public Meetings

The Open Public Meetings Act of 1971 requires that meetings of governing boards are open and accessible to the public.

All WCOG Council Board and Transportation Policy Board meetings are open to the public and public comment periods are provided during each regular meeting. Members of the public may attend WCOG's board meetings either at WCOG's offices or online.

4. HOW TO PARTICIPATE

The information below describes how any member of the public may participate in WCOG's transportation planning activities.

WCOG Board Meetings

Individuals wishing to provide input at WCOG board meetings can do so in several ways:

- Written comments can be submitted at or prior to board meetings.
- People can speak to the board during the public comment period of each meeting. Members of the public may speak for up to three minutes.

Comments should focus on items that the board will take action on at that meeting, or on discussion items appearing on the agenda.

Summaries of all verbal comments received at the meeting, and written comments, will be included in meeting minutes along with the name of the commenter. Minutes are posted on WCOG's website.

In certain circumstances, comments may be incorporated into plans, programs, or studies, either in total or in summary.

More information about what WCOG's board meetings do, when they meet, and how to provide input, is detailed below.

Council Board

What they do: This body of elected officials from around Whatcom County meets to determine WCOG's budget and review routine business.

When they meet: The Council Board meets four times a year. A calendar is available on WCOG's website at: <https://wcog.org/council>

How to attend: Meetings are held in person at WCOG's office (314 E. Champion Street, Bellingham, WA, 98225) and are also available virtually. To attend online, find the web link at: <https://wcog.org/council>

Transportation Policy Board

What they do: This body of elected officials from around Whatcom County meets to determine WCOG's work program, the Transportation Improvement Program, county-wide transportation project funding, and to discuss the and approve WCOG's plans.

When they meet: The Council Board meets every other month. A calendar is available on WCOG's website at: <https://wcog.org/policyboard>

How to attend: Meetings are held in person at WCOG's office (314 E. Champion Street, Bellingham, WA, 98225) and are also available virtually. To attend online, find the web link at: <https://wcog.org/policyboard>

Committee Meetings

Public comments on issues being discussed at committee meetings should be submitted at WCOG board meetings, as detailed above.

Community Transportation Advisory Group (CTAG)

CTAG is jointly administered by WCOG and the Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) to facilitate ongoing community participation in decision making about transportation planning, construction, and operations. It consists of community members from various jurisdictions in Whatcom County who have an interest in transportation and transit planning.

What they do: Agendas typically include upcoming decisions by regional transportation boards (the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board and the WTA Board of Directors), information on transportation trends, upcoming studies and projects, WTA service planning and operations, regional bicycle and pedestrian planning, and more.

When they meet: Meetings are held four times a year. A calendar is available on WCOG's website at: <https://wcog.org/how-to-participate>

How to attend: Meetings are held virtually. Find the web link at: <https://wcog.org/how-to-participate>

How to join CTAG

CTAG members are Whatcom County citizens with an interest in transportation and transit planning. Members participate and voice their opinions at meetings, receive invitation to CTAG events (e.g. tour of WTA operations, panel discussions with subject matter experts), and can opt in for periodic emails regarding feedback opportunities on draft plans, regional transportation topic updates, etc.

Applications for CTAG membership are open to anyone age 16 or older who lives, works, or owns a business located in Whatcom County. A CTAG membership application is required. Click [this link](#) to complete an online application, or request an application by email or mail by contacting Jaymes McClain at jaymes@wcog.org or by phone at (360) 685-8391.

NSTA

The North Sound Transportation Alliance (NSTA) is a coalition of concerned citizens, elected officials, and professional staff of transportation agencies from Washington’s five northwestern-most counties: Whatcom, Skagit, Island, San Juan, and northern Snohomish. NSTA strives to develop better ways for people to travel in the region by collecting travel and system data to identify needs; improving regional connections and sustaining and expanding services; enhancing mobility through sustainable, equitable, and innovative transportation solutions; and informing the public about transportation services to enhance awareness of the regional transportation network.

What they do: NSTA meetings serve the purpose of exchanging information between regional transportation and transit agencies, elected officials, and the public. They may solicit feedback on transportation-related priorities, or present findings or new plans that impact the five-county region.

When they meet: Meetings are held roughly three times a year. Meetings are announced on the WCOG website at: <https://wcog.org/nsta>

How to attend: Meetings vary between in-person events at various locations throughout the five-county region and virtual. To be added to the event notification mailing list, or if you have any questions about participating in NSTA, contact Melissa Fanucci at melissa@wcog.org or by phone at (360) 685-8385.

Plan Development

WCOG’s transportation plans typically represent the region as a whole and are consistent with each jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan. For each of WCOG’s plans there is a public comment period, and new efforts are underway starting in 2024 to engage in more direct outreach regarding plan updates and how people can have their voices heard in the process.

Individuals wishing to provide input on plans can do so in several ways:

- Attend in person or virtually a plan draft open house event.
- Learn more about the plan at one of the outreach events in the community.
- Provide feedback by email or phone.
- Provide feedback at a WCOG Transportation Policy Board meeting prior to its adoption of the final plan.

Comments received that concern specific projects or proposals are forwarded to the sponsoring entity, as appropriate, and comments are included in the final version of the plan, either in total or in summary.

Regional Plans

WCOG is responsible for developing and maintaining a long-range regional and metropolitan transportation plan. WCOG combines both into a single plan to ensure that the strategies developed will serve the entire region.

The most recent plan is **Way to Go, Whatcom: Whatcom Region's 2045 Regional/Metropolitan Transportation Plan** and is available at: <https://waytogowhatcom.org>

Why it matters: Every five years, the prioritization of regional transportation goals, and the goals themselves, are included in this plan. Individuals who wish to see changes in transportation priorities have this opportunity to have their voices heard on a regional level.

Prior community engagement: A public engagement effort prior to the update of the regional plan took place in the spring of 2021 to inform residents of the plan and solicit opinions and feedback on regional transportation concerns. Over two thousand individuals responded, and survey results were used to modify regional transportation system goals.

How to get involved in the next update: The next regional/metropolitan plan update will be in 2027. To be on a contact list to be informed of this and other opportunities to provide input, contact Melissa Fanucci at melissa@wcog.org or by phone at (360) 685-8385 to be added to the community engagement notification email list.

Whatcom Human Services Transportation Plan

Human services transportation serves people with special transportation needs. Washington state law defines people with special transportation needs as “*persons, including their personal attendants, who because of physical or mental disability, income status, or age are unable to transport themselves or purchase transportation.*” WCOG updates the Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) every five years to identify our region’s transportation services gaps for people with special transportation needs, and to present strategies and proposed investments to close those gaps.

Why it matters: The HSTP is a strategy for achieving the regional goal of *access and convenience*. By identifying funding priorities, the plan helps agencies put resources where they will help those who need it the most. In addition, WSDOT uses this plan to formulate its own HSTP strategies and to ensure that regional funding requests to the state’s Consolidated Grant Program have value in a community-based process.

Prior community engagement: The **2022 Whatcom Human Services Transportation Plan** sought public engagement through individual interviews with stakeholders and members of the public via internet-based platforms and phone calls; feedback from the 2021 public engagement survey; discussions with CTAG; discussions with participants in the North Sound

Transportation Alliance (NSTA) especially around NSTA's focus on healthcare and transportation; and through more traditional means of advertising and plan distribution.

How to get involved in the next update: The HSTP update will be in 2027 and will once again solicit comments and participation from Whatcom County residents to inform priorities and goals. To be on a contact list to be informed of this and other opportunities to provide input, contact Melissa Fanucci at melissa@wcog.org or by phone at (360) 685-8385 to be added to the community engagement notification email list.

WCOG Title VI Plan

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. WCOG is committed to ensuring that no person is denied the benefits of WCOG's services or excluded from its work program, publications, communications, and public involvement efforts. This plan lays out what efforts WCOG undertakes to ensure it is abiding by Title VI requirements and to make regional transportation planning a collaborative and equitable process.

Why it matters: The [2024 WCOG Title VI Plan](#) lays out how Title VI compliance is maintained at WCOG, as well as how individuals may file a complaint should they feel they have been discriminated against by WCOG.

How to get involved in this update: WCOG has updated its Title VI Plan concurrently with this Public Participation Plan, with a public comment period between November 3, 2023 and January 1, 2024 and an Open House held December 19. For more information about this plan, contact Melissa Fanucci at melissa@wcog.org or by phone at (360) 685-8385 for more information.

5. ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

To facilitate public participation in the Whatcom region, WCOG uses a variety of public outreach techniques, and provides information in multiple formats.

Communication

Website

WCOG's website provides information on the agency, web-based and/or digital/downloadable versions of official documents. Planning activities that are underway and open for public feedback are highlighted on the front page, and calendars for boards and committees are listed with links to meeting packets and how to attend virtually. The website can be translated into many languages using the translation tool embedded on the site.

Media Outreach

WCOG issues news releases and media advisories regarding new projects, when public comment is solicited, and for any major change at WCOG. WCOG also advertises its public meetings, requests for proposals, requests for feedback on plans, and other items in online and print versions of local newspapers (*Bellingham Herald*, *Cascadia Daily News*).

Direct Mail

For specific public engagement initiatives (E.g., 2017 household travel survey recruitment, 2021 Whatcom Transportation Survey), and depending on available funding, WCOG has had success with direct mail of postcards. Available funding determines certain aspects of these efforts such as the percentage of households that receive a mailing, and (as has been done in previous efforts) mailing to all households in lower-income and/or ethnic minority census-tracts.

Access to Documents

Almost all of WCOG's reports, plans, studies, meeting packets, minutes, and other materials are available digitally in WCOG's digital library at www.wcog.org, but hard copies are available at WCOG's offices and can be mailed to anyone upon request. To get copies of documents, contact WCOG's Public Information Officer at publicdisclosure@wcog.org.

Visualization Techniques

WCOG uses maps, charts, illustrations, and photographs in its documents and presentations to provide visual aids to illustrate key topics and regional objectives or trends.

WCOG uses customizable data visualizations and maps online to allow individuals to answer specific questions and download results.

Mailing Lists

Individuals who have requested or agreed to be on an email distribution list for updates about WCOG's activities and planning program are contacted periodically. Their feedback is also solicited through surveys, comments on plans, and other ways. To be added to WCOG's Engagement distribution list, contact Melissa Fanucci at melissa@wcog.org or by phone at (360) 685-8385 for more information.

Additional Services

Limited English Proficiency

To help people with limited English proficiency, meeting notices, agenda packets, summary documents for select plans and programs, and other materials may be translated into Spanish upon request. Additionally, WCOG makes a reasonable effort to accommodate the needs of speakers of other language when assistance is requested.

Disability

WCOG's website is compliant with the amended [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) to ensure that resources are safe and accessible for people with disabilities. All public meetings are held in locations that are ADA-accessible. And WCOG will provide an American Sign Language interpreter for hearing-impaired attendees, and assign staff to escort sight-impaired attendees, upon request.

Outreach Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations

WCOG will develop an Outreach Partnership distribution list of community-based organizations (CBOs) to work with to share information about how to get involved in regional transportation decision-making.

This may include:

- Presentations to CBO staff and volunteers, who can then pass on information to their community members.
- Co-hosting events with Outreach Partners that benefit the partners and allow WCOG time on the agenda to share information and solicit feedback.
- Developing easy-to-understand resource kits for outreach that avoid jargon, include clear timelines, and explain how to attend meetings and provide feedback.

Possible outreach partners are listed below, along with a specific demographic of the population that is typically overburdened and underrepresented in the planning process:

- **Bellingham Food Bank** –low-income, unhoused
- **Bellingham School District** – youth
- **Foothills Community Hub** – rural communities in East Whatcom County
- **Lummi Indian Business Council** – tribal communities
- **Nooksack Tribe Family Services** –tribal communities
- **Northwest Regional Council** –seniors, people with disabilities or behavioral health disorders
- **Opportunity Council** –low income, unhoused, veterans
- **Sea Mar Community Health Clinic** – seasonal workers, unhoused
- **Unity Care Northwest** –adults with behavior health disorders
- **Whatcom Council on Aging** –seniors
- **WWU Student Planning Club** – students

To reach specific LEP populations, outreach may also include Whatcom County’s Sikh temples, Spanish-speaking churches, and Russian-speaking churches.

In-Person Community Engagement

Another component of the 2024-2026 engagement strategy includes doing more proactive outreach in communities themselves. This may include asking questions or presenting information at public locations including:

- Farmers markets
- Grocery stores
- Shops with services
- Community sports or entertainment events

This effort will specifically focus on gathering input from all resident populations, including people of color, LGBTQ+, low-income, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and people with limited English proficiency.

Public Participation Activities by Plan or Program

The chart below provides an overview of WCOG’s strategies, tools, and public comment periods by specific plan or task. Public participation activities for non-recurring projects or efforts will be determined as part of the initial scoping effort.

Overview of Strategies, Tools, and Public Comment Periods	Policy Board Meetings	Website	Public Meetings	Interviews, Stakeholder Meetings, Agency Consultation	Surveys	Public Notice	Call for Public Comments (Length)	Press Releases & Media Outreach	Mailing Lists	Community Engagement Events	Outreach Partner Agency Engagement
Human Services Transportation Plan	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	2 weeks	☑	☑	☑	☑
Long-Range Transportation Plan Development	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	4 weeks	☑	☑	☑	☑
LongRange Transportation Plan Amendment	☑	☑	☑			☑	2 weeks				
Public Participation Plan	☑	☑				☑	4 weeks		☑		
Surface Transportation Block Grant Selection	☑	☑									
Title VI & Limited English Proficiency Plan	☑	☑	☑	☑		☑	2 weeks	☑	☑		
Title VI Annual Accomplishment Report	☑	☑									
Transportation Improvement Program	☑	☑				☑	2 weeks				
Unified Planning Work Program / Annual Performance & Expenditure Report	☑	☑									

6. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Summary of Public Outreach Activities

In the three-year period this Public Participation Plan covers, activities and accomplishments related to WCOG’s public engagement efforts are listed below:

Activity	Result
2021 - 2023 Board Meetings	No public feedback received
2021 Public Engagement Survey	Over 2,000 responses received
Way to Go, Whatcom: 2045 Region’s 2045 Regional/ Metropolitan Transportation Plan	15 emails/ phone calls from the public; feedback from 2 stakeholder agencies; 2 online open houses with 5 total attendees; 1 outreach event at a local community advisory committee; discussions with CTAG
2022 Whatcom Human Services Transportation Plan	Interviews with 18 stakeholder organizations and members of the public; discussions with CTAG

Evaluating 2024 – 2027 Engagement Strategies

The goals listed in Chapter 2 provide a way to evaluate the effectiveness of WCOG’s public engagement strategies. Information that can be used to evaluate the success of an engagement effort include:

- Number of comments collected at board meetings, outreach events, and in response to requests for feedback on plans.
- Feedback from an inclusive cross-section of the public.
- Information from attendees/respondents as to how they were informed of a WCOG event or plan.
- Representation from CBOs as Outreach Partners.
- Information as to whether event locations/meeting times/materials help or hinder participation.

This Public Participation Plan will be evaluated annually to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. The plan can be amended as necessary by the Council Board.