



How to Strengthen the BART Draft Public Participation Plan

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BART's Draft Public Participation Plan (PPP) is a good first step toward providing meaningful public participation in BART decisions. But it is missing some crucial components. We recommend additional steps be taken to ensure the public input is not empty, but has real impact.

By adopting these recommendations, you will make the public a partner in BART decision-making as well as move the agency towards achieving the ultimate objectives of Civil Rights and Environmental Justice regulations.

Strengths of the Public Participation Plan:

- The PPP outlines a very thorough and comprehensive set of outreach strategies that will surely garner a high level of public engagement and input. We have no recommendations for strengthening your outreach and public meeting processes.
- The PPP includes good goals and guiding principles about how the public's input should impact the **final outcomes** of BART decisions (examples below).

Goals include (*Draft PPP, page 6*):

Quality Input and Participation Comments received by BART are useful, relevant and constructive, contributing to better plans, projects, programs and decisions.

Clarity in Potential for Influence The process clearly identifies and communicates where and how participants can have influence and direct impact on decision making.

Guiding principals include (*Draft PPP, page 7*):

Transparent in Impact BART will communicate the results of the public's input in terms of the impact on decisions at a broad summary level, providing the major themes, the decisions reached and rationale for the decisions.

However, the implementation strategies do not truly support these:

- Performance measures do not ensure that the public's input does, indeed, affect the final outcomes of BART decisions.
- Specifically, there are no details on how BART will meet its commendable goals and guiding principles to: 1) ensure that the public's input **will** "contribute to better plans, projects, programs and decisions," and 2) ensure there **is** transparency that communicates how participants' input had a direct impact on decision making.

Without these steps, the public participation process will be an empty exercise that will result in a continued loss of public trust.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Public Participation Plan:

BART can create a public participation process that makes the community a genuine partner in BART decision-making. The Draft PPP provides a strong foundation for this process by laying out objectives focused on generating diverse and inclusive participation and ensuring that participation results in outcomes that respect and reflect community hopes and opinion. These steps can strengthen that foundation:

- 1) **Institutionalize informed community voice:** Create a standing community advisory committee made up of residents that represent the communities that live and work in BART station and service areas. The advisory committee should be counseled in all major service and fare change decisions, project development and approval, and have a direct line of communication to the BART Board with agenda time during BART Board meetings to make recommendations, on the record. BART should dedicate sufficient staff to properly assist the committee in achieving its work, and provide training for committee members on relevant subjects, including transit finance and planning, Environmental Justice, and Title VI.
- 2) **Encourage the BART Board to more effectively represent its constituencies:** Require BART board members to attend **all** public meetings (including focus groups and discussions) in their district. Also require board members to respond, on the record, to any recommendations arising from the standing advisory committee during BART Board meetings.
- 3) **Create a more transparent and meaningful decision-making process:** In addition to the two recommendations above, BART can meet its objectives of creating a process that both yields “better decisions” and is transparent by incorporating the following elements.
 - Involve the public early in decisions, so there is time to incorporate their feedback.
 - Offer the public clear alternatives or options to select from.
 - Provide equal outreach to all community organizations, no matter their position on an issue.
 - Track the feedback and quantify the feedback (i.e., how many people ‘voted’ for option 1 vs. options 2, 3 or 4?).
 - Give the public a direct line of communication to decision-makers. Whenever possible, reduce the barriers created by the 2-minute public speaking rules at BART meetings. This could also include offering opportunities for community-based organizations to make presentations at Board meetings to present issues and respond to staff recommendations.
 - Tell the public how their input factored into the final outcome of a decision by the BART Board and staff.

We appreciate this opportunity to provide feedback directly to the BART Board of Directors and would be more than happy to sit down with BART Board and staff to further discuss our recommendations. To do so, please contact Lindsay Imai at Urban Habitat at 510-839-9510 x 305 or Lindsay@urbanhabitat.org.