Appendix A

Public Involvement Report

Will Connects 2040

Prepared for:

Will County Division of Transportation

December 2016
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Public Involvement Report Sections

The Public Involvement Report Sections contain supporting public involvement materials that were developed or collected throughout the planning process. Due to the large size, the Public Involvement Report Sections is a standalone document. The Public Involvement Report Sections are:

1. Public Involvement Plan
2. Survey Report #1
3. Survey Report #2
4. Survey Report #3
5. Newsletters
6. List of Media Articles
7. Open House Round 1 Comments
8. Open House Round 2 Comments
9. Public Hearing & Draft Plan Comments

The Public Involvement Report Sections document is available for download on the Will County website, or a hard copy is available for review at the Will County Division of Transportation office. Contact information is provided below.

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1. Introduction

The Will Connects 2040 planning process provided an opportunity for the County to evaluate the current transportation system and future transportation needs, challenges and priorities. Throughout the planning process, the Will County Division of Transportation (WCDOT) committed to consistent engagement with members of the public and active communication with stakeholders, individuals, and organizations to ensure that their experiences and opinions would be considered as part of the plan’s development. This document summarizes and documents the public involvement activities conducted as part of Will Connects 2040.

2. Overview of Public Involvement Activities

2.1 Public Involvement Objective

At the outset of the project, the WCDOT developed a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) which outlined the public involvement objectives, stakeholder outreach, and public engagement activities and tools that would be used to engage the public throughout the planning process (see Section 1 for PIP). The main goal of the PIP and public engagement was to provide opportunities for stakeholders to offer feedback and input early and frequently throughout the duration of the planning process. The public engagement process focused on engaging a variety of constituents, including users of the transportation system, residents, workers, business owners, transit users, freight operators, bicyclists, and other groups that are often under-represented. This was accomplished by offering a variety of ways for the public to provide feedback throughout the planning process, as detailed within this report.

2.2 Summary of Activities

Brief summaries and documentation of the Will Connects 2040 public involvement activities are included in the following sections of this report. Stakeholder and public engagement activities included:

- Advisory Committee
- Project Website
- Contact List/ Email Notices
- MetroQuest Surveys
- Newsletters
- Media Outreach
- Open Houses
- Pop-up Meeting
- Public Hearings

2.3 Project Timeline

A detailed timeline was developed at the beginning of the project to establish key milestones and deadlines. The public involvement activities were aligned with the key milestones to ensure that public information was provided in an appropriate timeframe to gain input and feedback.
3. Advisory Committee

The WCDOT identified representatives at the beginning of the planning process to serve on a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) and a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which were combined to create an overall Advisory Committee (AC). AC representatives included key civic and business leaders, and transportation professionals from local, regional, and statewide agencies (see Figure 2 for a list of AC members). The AC met a total of seven times at key milestones during the planning process to share their expertise, insight, and provide strategic direction for the plan. The AC worked together to develop plan goals; provide guidance for development of modeling scenarios to understand project impacts; and offer input and vetting of a comprehensive project priority list.

Separate one-on-one stakeholder meetings were also held with some AC members in the winter and spring of 2015 to gather additional feedback. One-on-one meetings were held with the following agencies: Will County Land Use Department, Illinois Tollway, Pace, Regional Transportation Authority, Will County Farm Bureau, Metra, Illinois Department of Transportation, the Center for Economic Development, the Will County Executive’s Office, and the Forest Preserve District of Will County. These meetings were held to more fully understand the needs, issues, and priorities for the County’s transportation network and to coordinate on-going and future projects in the County.

Figure 2 Advisory Committee Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE</th>
<th>TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will County Board</td>
<td>Illinois Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will County Center for Economic Development</td>
<td>Illinois State Toll Highway Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will County Executive’s Office</td>
<td>METRA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will County Farm Bureau</td>
<td>Pace Suburban Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will County Governmental League</td>
<td>Regional Transportation Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will County Land Use</td>
<td>South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will County Sheriff</td>
<td>Forest Preserve District of Will County</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association</td>
<td>Will County Executive’s Office</td>
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<td>Will County Governmental League</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Will County Land Use</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Will County Township Highway Commissioners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Project Website

A project website was developed at the beginning of the planning process and served as an important portal for sharing project updates with the general public. The website, www.WillConnects2040.org, was created to share information about the plan, project timelines, project documents, and a comment form was added as an option for the public to leave feedback. The website contained regularly updated project materials including project newsletters, project surveys, and notices of upcoming events.

Figure 3 Project Website Homepage

5. Contact Lists/Email Notices

Constant Contact, an electronic mailing database, was used to distribute all project communications. The database contained contact information for over 1,100 Will County stakeholders, including Will County Board members, Will County mayors, state senators and representatives, and township supervisors. Contacts also included Will County residents, community organizations, business associations, churches, municipal contacts, public meeting attendees, MetroQuest survey respondents, and the media.

The database was used to disseminate project information including open house and public hearing notices and reminders, survey notices, newsletters, and media announcements. The database was used to send notices to municipalities, legislators, and agencies asking them for their assistance promoting the open houses and project surveys through their communication channels.
6. **MetroQuest Survey**

Metro Quest is an online community engagement tool used for planning projects, and is an effective tool that provides a forum for sharing project information and collecting public input. Three separate Metro Quest surveys were used during the plan development process to gain input from the public. The feedback collected during each phase informed and shaped the development of the final plan.

More than 650 respondents participated in the Phase I survey. The Phase I survey asked respondents to set the direction for the Will Connects 2040 plan and to select their transportation goals and priorities (see Section 2 for the Survey Report #1).

Over 620 respondents participated in the Phase II survey. The Phase II survey focused on what future travel conditions should look like in 2040. The goal was to gather feedback on potential improvements and future travel options (see Section 3 for the Survey Report #2).

More than 650 respondents provided input through the Phase III survey. The survey focused on defining project priorities and developing budget allocations (see Section 4 for the Survey Report #3).

7. **Newsletters**

Will County issued four newsletters over the course of the project in a proactive approach to communicate with the public and stakeholders. The newsletters were distributed at key intervals that corresponded to project milestones and in an effort to increase public engagement through surveys and open houses. The newsletters included up-to-date information about the project and work conducted, as well as locations of upcoming open houses and the dates the MetroQuest surveys were open. Additional information included updates from AC meetings, project timelines, and survey results. Each newsletter strongly encouraged all recipients to visit the project website for project updates and to review project documents. The newsletters were sent through an online database and were also provided in a PDF format. The PDF version was also placed on the project documents section of the website. Each newsletter was provided in English and in Spanish (see Section 5 for all project newsletters).
8. Media Outreach

Media outreach was an important component in informing and educating the public, elected officials, and stakeholders about Will Connects 2040. Several media advisories and press releases were sent to the media to inform them of open houses, surveys, and the draft plan public comment period and public hearings. The media list included local news organizations, community papers, and special interest publications.

Generating County-wide news attention and media interest proved beneficial in informing the general public about Will Connects 2040 surveys, open houses, and public hearings. There were a significant number of articles that were written by local media outlets during the course of the project. The County Executive also was interviewed by local radio station WJOL to discuss the plan and the open houses. Press clips were collected throughout the project to archive all news articles and media posts about the project (see Section 6). Two media buys were placed in the Joliet Herald before the first round of open houses and before the public hearings to reach a broader audience. Sample of news organizations that covered Will Connects 2040 planning progress include:

9. Open Houses

9.1 Overview

Two rounds of open houses were held during the planning process. The open houses were held as a way to share information about the draft plan and secure feedback from residents, business owners, transportation users, and other members of the public. In order to collect input from throughout the county, open houses were held at five separate locations for each round: Joliet, Wilmington, New Lenox, University Park, and Romeoville.

Each of the open houses were structured to provide the public an opportunity to learn about the planning process, key issues facing the transportation network, and initial recommendations. The open houses also collected input from attendees to help shape a plan that truly reflects the current and future needs of County residents.

Information and announcements about the open house dates were conveyed in English and Spanish (in most formats) via:
• Electronic mailing database;  
• Project website;  
• Meeting announcements;  
• Flyers;  
• Radio announcements;  
• Newspaper articles (earned media); and,  
• Newspaper Ad (Round 1 only)

At each round of open houses, information about the planning process was provided in a variety of formats, including a continuous PowerPoint presentation and display boards. WCDOT staff and project team members were available to answer questions and explain plan elements in further detail at each of the open houses. A Spanish translator was present at each of the open houses.

9.2 Round 1 Open Houses

The first round of open houses was held in April, May and June of 2015. Nearly 200 people from throughout Will County attended the open houses. The open houses were designed to provide an opportunity to inform the public about the Will Connects 2040 planning effort and to collect input from residents, business owners, and members of the public on work completed to date.

Activity stations provided an opportunity to engage and interact with the public as well as facilitate the gathering of public input. Activity stations included a locality map station, Forest Preserve bicycle planning stations, Will County Map station (for marking up and commenting directly on map provided), and a values identification station. Nearly 750 unique comments and input were collected through various means, including locality map input, written comment forms, value cards, and via email (see Section 7 for Round 1 Open House comments).

Figure 9 Open House Round 1 Photos
9.3 Round 2 Open Houses

The second round of open houses was held in January of 2016. Over 200 people from throughout Will County attended the open houses. These open houses were designed to provide the public an update on the planning process and allowed attendees to weigh-in on their priorities for future transportation investments in the County. Several exhibit boards were displayed throughout the room and a presentation describing key elements of the plan was played on a loop throughout the open houses.

Several activity stations were set up to gather input from open house attendees, including a locality map station; Forest Preserve bicycle planning station; MetroQuest survey stations; and a budget allocation station. A general comment card was also provided. Over 746 comments and input were collected through these activities (see Section 8 for Round 1 Open House comments).

Figure 10 Open House Round 2 Photos
10. Pop-up Meeting

A pop-up meeting was held at the Will County Fair Grounds on August 28, 2015, to provide additional opportunities to interact with the public. Project staff members staffed a booth to share information about Will Connects 2040 and answer questions. Laptops and tablets were also available for fairgoers to take the MetroQuest Phase II survey.

11. Public Hearing and Comment Period

The draft Will Connects 2040 Plan was released in September 2016 for the public to review and provide comment. Due to the level of interest, the comment period was extended beyond the original November 2, 2016, deadline to December 15, 2016. In addition, two public hearings were held during the comment period. Information about the draft plan’s availability for review, the formal comment period, and the public hearings were conveyed to stakeholders and the general public through:

- Email notifications to project contact lists;
- Hard copy letter to County Board members, Township Supervisors and Highway Commissioners, and Mayors;
- Media Advisory and Press Release to local media outlets; and,
- Advertisement in Joliet Herald (see Figure 11).

There were several options available to the public to provide feedback on the draft plan. The public could provide input through:

- Paper comment form provided at Public Hearings;
- Public testimony collected by court reporter at Public Hearings;
- Website comment form on the project website;
- Email to info@willconnects2040.org; and,
- Mailed comments to the WCDOT.

The WCDOT hosted two public hearings to provide stakeholders and the public at large an opportunity to comment on the draft Will Connects 2040 Plan. The public hearings were held on October 11, from 4:30 to 7:00 pm, at New Lenox Village Hall at One Veterans Parkway, New Lenox, IL 60451 and October 18, from 4:30 to 7:00 pm, Romeoville Village Hall at 1050 West Romeo Road, Romeoville, IL 60446.

The public hearings were an open house format with display boards summarizing the findings and recommended investment priorities. A court reporter was present to transcribe verbal comments. The following stations for draft plan information and opportunities for comment were provided:

- Laptops with an online version of the draft Will Connects 2040 available for review and comment;
- Printed hard copies of the draft Will Connects 2040 plan for review and reference with written comment forms available;
- Boards showing key plan highlights/elements; and,
PowerPoint presentation on rotation.

Approximately 75 people attended the public hearings and 25 provided written comments; six people provided verbal testimony to the court reporter. Over 200 comments were submitted during the 85-day comment period. All comments received related to the draft plan during the 85-day comment period are captured in Section 9. This includes comments submitted in writing and the official transcripts of verbal comments recorded by the court reporter during the public hearings held on October 11 (New Lenox) and October 18 (Romeoville), as well as comments submitted online via the project website or sent in writing to info@willconnect2040.org or to the WCDOT office directly.

Figure 11 Public Hearing Ad
Figure 12 Public Hearing Photos
12. Conclusion

*Will Connects 2040* is a plan that will serve as the framework for transportation infrastructure and investments through 2040. Throughout the planning process, multiple opportunities were given through a variety of activities and formats to ensure that the final plan represents the needs and preferences of Will County residents. In total, three online surveys and 10 in-person open houses were held. The public provided nearly 6,000 separate pieces of input through surveys, written comments, and interactive exercises. The WCDOT reviewed and considered all comments, which are reflected in the final plan. Through regular engagement with members of the public, the final *Will Connects 2040* plan provides a long range vision that represents the needs and desires of the residents of Will County.