

8.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

As part of the public outreach efforts, OMEGA conducted eight public involvement meetings (one in each county of the RTPO). The following is a summary of the meetings as well as the major topics that were discussed.

8.1 Overview

Public involvement meetings were conducted in each county of the OMEGA RTPO region in April and May of 2015. Meeting times were slotted to last one hour and thirty minutes and all meetings were scheduled after 6:00 pm to better accommodate the general public's working schedule. All of the meetings were held in public library meeting rooms as well. Notifications consisted of radio announcements, radio interviews with OMEGA staff, newspapers, and e-mail notifications to the Transportation Advisory Committee, OMEGA Executive Board and Membership, Citizens Advisory Board members, and to economic development professionals within each county. Copies of the meeting notice, presentation, minutes, and attendance list for each county are provided in Appendices A through H. The presentation consisted of a Power Point, two activities, and a question and answer session. Attendees were invited to send comments to OMEGA within one month of each meeting's date.

The presentation was designed to provide an overview of the RTPO, a summary of the assets of the region, and specific information about the county that was targeted at the meeting. Recommended projects were also presented so as to give the public an opportunity to provide feedback on the current and proposed county projects. Long term regional projects and goals were also presented to the attendees.

Two activities were included in the presentations to encourage feedback from the public. The first activity was a participatory mapping exercise (noted as "breakout session" within the meeting minutes) that occurred before the review of the transportation data for the RTPO and specific to each county. In the activity, participants were asked to identify on a poster-size map of their county, along with large scale maps of encompassing urban areas, the locations of transportation related issues or concerns. This exercise allowed for group collaboration and information sharing, and provided a way for the public to voice transportation concerns within their county and the OMEGA RTPO region. This exercise was quite valuable in obtaining information that quantitative data may not have provided. Many of the areas of concern identified by the general public were consistent with the priorities identified in the Regional Transportation Plan.

The second was in the form of a survey, which was provided to each of the participants during the public involvement meetings. Complete survey results are provided in Appendix I. In the survey, participants were asked to prioritize the transportation topics that were of concern to them, their use of various modes of transportation, and also to provide general comments on our existing transportation systems. A total of 24 surveys were completed at the meetings. The results of the survey showed that roadway safety was the biggest overall concern of the attendees, while maintenance of our roads and bridges

was second and congestion was third. Airports and river access were the lowest ranked transportation topics. Twelve percent of meeting attendees responded that they use public transit and 83% responded that they do walk within their communities. Fifty-four percent responded that they use the bicycle pathways with the RTPO. The prioritized list of concerns is summarized in Table 8-1 and a copy of the survey is provided in Figure 8-1.

TABLE 8-1: PRIORITIZED TRANSPORTATION CONCERNS

<u>PRIORITY</u>	<u>CONCERN</u>
1	Roadway Safety
2	Maintenance of Roads and Bridges
3	Congestion
4	Public Transit
5	Rail
6	Pedestrian Access
7	Bicycle Access
8	Airports
9	River Access

8.2 Public Comment Summary

Several concerns were expressed consistently amongst attendees at the public involvement meetings. These concerns are outlined in the sections which follow.

8.2.1 Roadway Safety

As noted through comments, the mapping exercise, and the survey, roadway safety was the most prevalent concern expressed by the meeting attendees. These attendees typically noted places where fatalities and crashes occurred, but also dangerous areas where accident rates might be low but the potential to have accidents is high. Additionally, many of the areas outlined by the attendees were listed as priority locations in our Regional Transportation Plan. The primary safety concerns identified by the public included:

- Truck traffic (namely from oil and gas activity)
- Recent roadway fatalities
- Congested roadways in municipalities
- Bike safety along roadways
- Safety Signage
- Geometric alignments
- Re-routing of roads to safer routes

FIGURE 8-1: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

THE OHIO
MID-EASTERN
GOVERNMENTS
ASSOCIATION

Public Involvement Survey

Please take time to fill out our survey. We value your comments as we work to improve transportation in our region.

1. What are your major concernings regarding transportation? Please rank the below items as 1 being the most important and 9 being the least important.

- Roadway Safety
- Congestion
- Maintenance of Roads and Bridges
- Public Transportation
- Bicycle Access (Trails)
- Pedestrian Access (Sidewalks)
- Rail
- Airports
- River Access

2. Do you use public transportation?

- Yes No

3. Do you walk through your city/village?

- Yes No

4. Do you use any of the bicycles pathways in the OMEGA region?

- Yes No

5. What do you think is the most important issue in your county?



As the single topic that was consistently mentioned in every meeting, roadway safety is a significant issue for our region. Additionally, due to the voiced concern of a citizen at our public involvement meeting in Guernsey County, a road sign safety improvement (a School Bus Stop Ahead sign on SR 660) has already been implemented. Roadway safety is now a topic that is supported by the interests of the general public, local officials, and through OMEGA's data analysis.

8.2.2 Roadway Maintenance

A consistent theme that emerged within our meetings was that general road pavement maintenance is a major concern in our region. Public officials and the general public have concerns about pavement maintenance. Roadway quality has deteriorated so severely in parts of our region that attendees mentioned sections of road and even entire roadways were becoming unusable. Attendees typically cited the harsh winters that are becoming a recurring phenomenon for Appalachian Ohio and how these climatic conditions are negatively impacting pavement conditions. Additionally, damages to roadways from increased oil and gas activities were noted in many of our counties as well. Public officials consistently noted how, despite the increased need for maintenance and repairs, revenues for road maintenance are not adequate to meet the increased need. Specific issues concerning roadway maintenance were mentioned in Coshocton, Holmes, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas Counties, along with the City of Coshocton, the City of East Liverpool, and the Village of Millersburg.

Pavement maintenance will continue to be a concern as communities within the RTPO struggle with funding to repair transportation infrastructure. As noted in the public meetings, this is a major concern of the general public.

8.2.3 Congestion

Indicated as the third greatest concern in our survey analysis, congestion was a major topic during the public meetings. The mapping exercises noted areas where congestion occurs in the RTPO region, especially within the cities and villages. Attendees agreed with many of the congested areas identified by OMEGA. Different issues relating to roadway congestion were discussed at the meetings and are listed below:

- Truck traffic congestion in oil and gas producing counties
- I-70 freight and vehicle traffic volumes
- Tourism (specifically in Holmes County)
- Commuting traffic between cities and villages

The public meetings revealed that concern was not limited to roadway congestion. Rail traffic and the increase in rail use that is expected to occur in our oil and gas producing counties was a topic of concern as well. Increased rail traffic may cause additional congestion issues on roadways due to potentially long waits at rail crossings. Attendees from Harrison and Carroll Counties both noted how increased rail use

in their region has caused roadway congestion by increasing wait times at crossings especially for emergency vehicles. The public perceives that increased rail usage may cause significant problems in the future.

8.2.4 Public Transit

Public transit needs were expressed in several meetings including Carroll, Guernsey, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas counties. In these meetings representatives from transit agencies, human service agencies that rely on the use of transit, economic development leaders, and the general public expressed concerns regarding transit in their counties and regional access to public transit. Below are some of the public transit concerns that were expressed at the public involvement meetings:

- Need for general transit services to areas currently without service
- Longer operating hours (evenings and weekends)
- Regional access to points of interest outside service areas (often limited by county or city jurisdiction)
- Funding for public transit
- Access to transit for those in rural areas
- Extending transit opportunities past Medicare/Medicaid recipients
- Transit to meet the needs for social service agencies
- Coordination of agencies to provide a larger service area

Through these needs expressed in our meetings, public transit is one of great importance to the general public. Additionally, many of the concerns mentioned above were repeated throughout our meetings, demonstrating consistency of certain needs across the RTPO region.

8.2.5 The Columbus to Pittsburgh Corridor

Our meetings revealed that there is an interest across the OMEGA Region to revive the Columbus to Pittsburgh Corridor, especially in the counties through which it would pass. Benefits from improving this corridor, as expressed by the attendees, included:

- Likelihood of increased economic development in region
- Decreased congestion in surrounding roadways, specifically I-70
- Reduced safety concerns
- Alleviation of truck traffic congestion and perceived hazards associated with high volumes of truck traffic

Several attendees supported the idea of re-instating a group within the OMEGA region that would be dedicated to bring local government, the general public, private businesses, and regional organizations together to further assess and subsequently develop this corridor. They felt that, by bringing

stakeholders with varied interests, support would be achieved from additional organizations, thereby making the corridor a reality. Also, attendees from Harrison County had creative and innovative ideas to complete the corridor through Harrison County, such as with solar roadways to generate revenue.

8.2.6 Transportation and Economic Development

Using our transportation systems to promote and enhance economic development was important to the attendees at our meetings. For many, our transportation assets provide opportunities for those outside of the region to enter, especially through tourism, corridor design, and general street improvements. Developing our transportation assets would also assist in creating commercial and industrial landscapes, thereby generating jobs in our region. Below are specific transportation assets/projects that attendees felt would increase economic development in the OMEGA region:

- US 30 Ohio's Energy Corridor in Columbiana County
- Re-routing SR 14 around the City of Salem
- The Columbus to Pittsburgh Corridor
- Public transit in cities
- Rail access for both passengers and increased freight
- Industrial park improvements
- Bicycle pathway improvements
- Airport improvements

Improvements to these assets will likely generate economic development in the RTPO region. By viewing transportation systems in this manner, attendees provided insightful viewpoints on how improved transportation can promote economic development.

8.3 SUMMARY

The public involvement process was both valuable and insightful. First, receiving feedback on our research and scope was invaluable; finding public support on areas and projects that were identified, and also those which were not supported, was informative. Second, receiving public insight about the RTPO area provided information that statewide and regional data could not. New issues were presented which is helpful in shaping the ways that transportation needs will be addressed in the future.

The public involvement meetings provided OMEGA the opportunity to inform the general public of OMEGA's role as an RTPO and benefits the RTPO may provide for the region. More importantly, these meetings allowed the general public to provide a voice on the proposed projects and needs of the region. Public involvement meetings greatly supported our functionality as an RTPO.