



Extraordinary Outreach Guides Project Decisions and Avoids Environmental Justice Issues

BUSINESS 40, WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

Case Highlights

Description: The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is proposing to improve a one-mile section of Business 40 through downtown Winston-Salem. The project area is located in the heart of Winston-Salem and includes a large portion of downtown, as well as the central neighborhoods that define the core area of this metropolitan region. Core neighborhoods include a mix of affluent and largely white populations, low-income populations, and minority populations. Other ongoing traffic improvements in the area have required a series of traffic detours and delays, and resulted in a sense of frustration for many residents. Extraordinary public involvement efforts, including a door-to-door survey through all neighborhoods with potential to be directly impacted by the project, were used early in the environmental study to understand public perspectives and build a foundation for project decisions. This outreach led to a largely supported decision to close this section of Business 40 for a period of two years during construction in lieu of a six-year partial closure.

Key Concepts: Effective practices in addressing environmental justice include: Early, phased, and extensive public involvement; door-to-door outreach; effective meeting practices; training of the outreach team; practical tips for public involvement; establishing effective communication among the project team; and structured decision-making.

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Introduction

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is proposing to improve a one-mile section of Business 40 through downtown Winston-Salem. The project area is located in the heart of Winston-Salem and includes a large portion of downtown, as well as the central neighborhoods that define the core area of this metropolitan region. Core neighborhoods include a mix of affluent and largely white populations, low-income populations, and minority populations. Other ongoing traffic improvements in the area have required a series of traffic detours and delays, and resulted in a sense of frustration for many residents.

At the outset of the environmental study, two potential options for completing the improvements to Business 40 were under consideration: complete closure for two years or partial closure for six years. NCDOT has conducted, and continues to conduct, an extensive public involvement program for the Business 40 improvement project. Public outreach efforts were initially aimed at informing the public, understanding travel patterns in the project area, and collecting public opinions regarding the design of construction (either two-year complete closure, or six-year partial closure). Corridor-wide meetings were then held to share findings from this initial stage. Current public involvement efforts are focused on design working groups that are scheduled to continue through 2012. The identification and

initial analysis of alternatives is still underway. This case does not address the identification or characterization of impacts to low-income or minority populations, but rather demonstrates how extraordinary public involvement efforts can be used early in the environmental study of transportation improvements, to understand public perspectives and build a foundation for project decisions.



“... [The head of NCDOT’s Human Environment Section at the time] wanted as many people to touch the Business 40 project as possible...he did not want to hear that someone had never heard about the project”

*-Anne Morris
Business 40 Outreach Staff*



Project Context

Business 40 is a four-lane, median-divided, controlled access facility through downtown Winston-Salem that connects to Interstate 40 (I-40) west of downtown and east of Kernersville. A regional project location map is shown on Figure 1. Major roadways near the project area include US 52-311/NC 8 (referred)

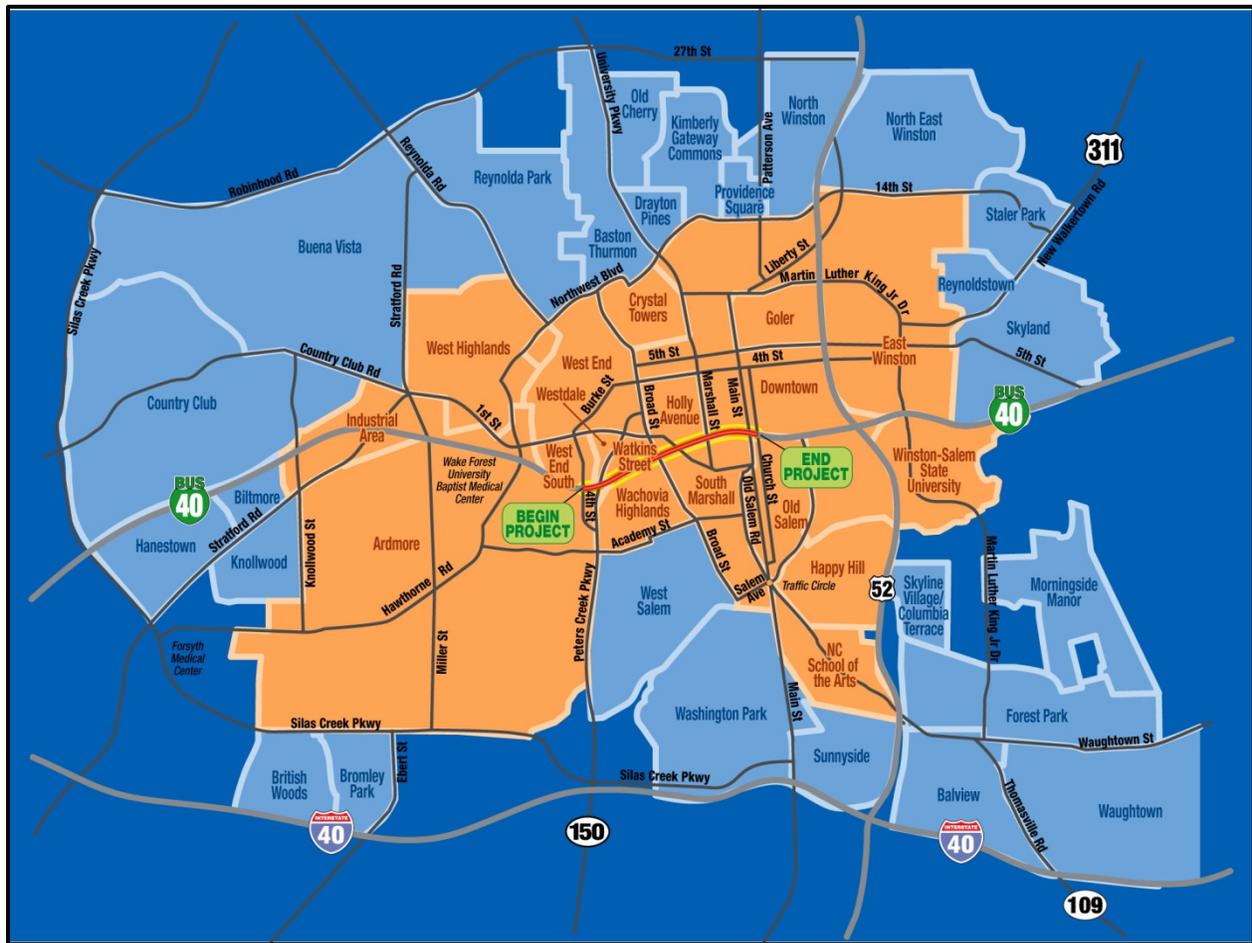


Figure 1. Business 40 in Winston-Salem, NC project map.

to as US 52) and I-40. US 52 runs north-south through the east side of downtown. I-40 is located to the south of the project area and runs east-west, providing regional connections to Asheville to the west, and Greensboro, Raleigh, and Wilmington to the east.

The section of Business 40 through downtown Winston-Salem was designed and constructed in the early 1950s, and the bridges and roadway pavement are showing signs of deterioration. The bridge over Liberty Street is in need of repair and has been temporarily stabilized. The Green Street bridge over Business 40 has been

closed to traffic due to being designated structurally unsound. In addition, Business 40 was not designed to accommodate current traffic levels. The Peters Creek Parkway bridge needs to be widened to serve new development in the area. Finally, Business 40 was constructed before interstate design standards were adopted and does not meet current design standards.

The Business 40 improvement project will include removing and replacing highway pavement, replacing bridges, and improving ramps along Business 40 from west of 4th Street to east of Church Street near downtown

Winston-Salem. Due to the limited width of existing right-of-way, some additional right-of-way may be required. The project is intended to create a safer, longer lasting roadway that will help drivers get where they need to go more efficiently.

The Region and the Community

The project is located in the City of Winston-Salem in the piedmont region of North Carolina. Winston-Salem is the fourth largest city in the State with a current total population of nearly 230,000 people. The city has a rich history dating back to the origin of the town of Salem in 1753. The growth of the community over the subsequent 250 years in the areas of business, the arts, education, and healthcare, along with associated residential development, have all contributed to the intensity of development and land use patterns in the current community. These elements have together made the city a desirable place to live and continue to contribute toward increased pressure for redevelopment of existing land uses. Features that define the area include numerous historical resources, employment centers, higher education institutions, and a vibrant arts and entertainment district.

Business 40 traverses the city from east to west creating two halves; north and south. Vehicular connectivity between these two halves has been well maintained. There are differences in the nature and density of land uses between the two halves, primarily as a result of two separate communities (Winston and Salem) growing together. The Town of Salem was originally established on the south side of Business 40 and today is comprised of many historic districts and is primarily residential and institutional in development. The Town of Winston developed

to the north of historic Salem as an industrial center and today contains the majority of the downtown Central Business District. Together these areas complement each other by providing a healthy mix of commercial and residential land uses with recreational, cultural, and tourism opportunities.

Environmental Justice Populations in the Study Area

The Direct Community Impact Area is the area surrounding the project that is likely to be directly affected in any way during, throughout, and after project construction. The Direct Community Impact Area is located in the heart of Winston-Salem and includes a large portion of the downtown core and central neighborhoods. The Direct Community Impact Area includes all or portions of twelve named neighborhoods, which are all well-established and generally consist of older homes, though redevelopment is occurring in several areas.

Neighborhoods in the southeastern portion of the Direct Community Impact Area are identified as areas with primarily low-income and minority populations while neighborhoods in the northwestern portion of the Direct Community Impact Area are generally identified as more affluent.

Approximately 64 percent of the total Direct Community Impact Area population is minority. More than 50 percent of the area is Black/African American. Minority population percentages are highest in block groups in the southern and eastern portions of the project area, which is consistent with this area's history as a Black/African American community. Historically Black/African American neighborhoods include Happy Hill, East

Winston, Winston-Salem State University, and Skyline Village/Columbia Terrace.

2010 US Census block groups with the highest percentages of people living below poverty level include public housing developments in the Happy Hill Gardens and Skyline Village neighborhoods in the southeastern Direct Community Impact Area, and the East Winston neighborhood in the northeastern Direct Community Impact Area.

A Spanish-speaking Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population was identified where 8.9 percent of the population speaks English less than “Very Well.” Individual block groups with the highest percentages of Spanish-speaking individuals that speak English less than very well are located in the southeast portion of the Direct Community Impact Area and in the Wachovia Highlands neighborhood.

What Happened

When the environmental study for the Business 40 improvement project was initiated, there were several recently completed and ongoing projects in and around Winston-Salem:

- Improvements to the Peters Creek Parkway interchange with Business 40
- Ongoing improvements to US 52 between Business 40 and Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
- Improvements to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive interchange with Business 40
- Construction of the Salem Creek Connector between Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and Salem Avenue
- Signal system improvements throughout the city.

The NCDOT Division Engineer recognized the extent of transportation work that was already occurring, and the resulting stress and frustration felt in the community because of closures, delays, detours, and other inconveniences associated with construction. The Division Engineer understood that this frustration would be further compounded by a major project, like the proposed improvements to Business 40, with associated closures on a major transportation route in the heart of the city. He conveyed the need for an extraordinary public involvement and outreach approach early on. That need was further supported by the head of NCDOT’s Human Environment Section (who has since retired), and the Board of Transportation member representing the district that included Winston-Salem. Through their combined support and help from FHWA, an Accelerated Construction Technology Transfer (ACTT) conference was convened. ACTT conferences are sponsored by FHWA and are meant to bring together a panel of experts from across the country who have dealt with a similar challenging project issue. In this case, experts who had worked on a highway project, through the heart of an urban area with potential options for closure, and impacts to the surrounding community, were brought together. These experts shared their lessons learned and helped to chart a path forward for the Business 40 project. The resulting public outreach effort was unprecedented in the State of North Carolina.

Development of a Public Involvement Plan

NCDOT hired a powerhouse team of public involvement and environmental justice experts to design and carry out outreach for the early phases of the Business 40 study. A well-known specialist in environmental justice managed the public outreach team and brought in an expert

Putting the Public Involvement Plan in Context –Why the Extraordinary Measures Made Sense for Business 40

The public involvement plan for Business 40 included some extraordinary measures - this is why:

- There was already a sense of frustration and resentment for NCDOT and transportation projects because of ongoing road construction.
- NCDOT was hearing conflicting information about preferences for a two-year closure or six-year partial closure of Business 40 – they wanted to reach out to all parts of the community to find a consensus.
- While Business 40 is a highway, it runs through the heart of downtown and is used like a local road. There will be many types of users impacted by project decisions – surrounding neighborhoods, businesses, hospitals and other regional service providers, and both local and regional drivers.
- Closing Business 40 during construction could mean that drivers would detour through the East Winston neighborhood. East Winston is a primarily Black/African American neighborhood and residents were traditionally not involved in typical public outreach activities. It was critical for them to have an opportunity for meaningful participation.

who had led outreach efforts of a similar caliber for the I-70 East project in Colorado, to design the outreach approach and provide hands-on leadership; and a public involvement expert with a local presence in Winston-Salem, who could respond to immediate needs in the area. A third

expert, who led public involvement during construction for the “Big I” in Albuquerque, New Mexico, will lead outreach during the eventual construction of Business 40.

Typically, public outreach for an environmental study in North Carolina begins with the development of a public involvement plan, or PIP. While the PIP can be adjusted during the course of study, it basically outlines the scope of public involvement activities that are planned as part of the study process. For this project, the outreach team requested, and NCDOT approved, a substantial amount of funds to complete early information gathering and outreach to inform the development of the PIP. This initial information gathering was intended to help the outreach team get to know the area and the people. It involved conducting a “windshield survey” (visual survey conducted by car) through every street in the Direct Community Impact Area. The outreach team was looking for information about potential gathering places, meeting sites, community features, and important places in the community. They talked with 85 formal and informal leaders in the community, including hospital staff, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, downtown businesses, the police department, the metropolitan planning association, bus drivers, schools, and neighborhood associations to find out what issues were important to people in the area, best methods for outreach, potential leaders who could provide inroads to hard-to-reach groups, and places for meetings. Armed with this information, they were able to create a PIP to guide ongoing outreach.

Surveys

A decision needed to be made, early on in the project study, whether the construction of the

Business 40 Public Involvement Timeline

- Door-to-door surveys (October 2007 – June 2008)
- Corporate Intranet surveys (February – May 2008)
- Interchange ramp surveys (May 2008)
- Neighborhood meetings (Spring 2008)
- Stakeholder meetings (Ongoing)
- Corridor-wide meetings (Ongoing)
- Working groups (Ongoing)

project should be designed to take place over two years, with full closure of a section of Business 40, or six years, with partial closure of the highway. Early conversations with community leaders as part of the development of the PIP indicated that the community would prefer a six-year partial closure approach. However, NCDOT and their outreach team moved forward with an intensive strategy to find out what a broader spectrum of the community really preferred.

Door-to-Door Outreach

NCDOT used a different approach for reaching out to “Core Neighborhoods” and “Surrounding Neighborhoods.” In the project map shown in Figure 1, Core Neighborhoods are shaded orange and Surrounding Neighborhoods are blue. The Core Neighborhoods were those that directly or indirectly touched the Business 40 project or had primary arteries that could be designated as an alternate route. These neighborhoods were contacted through an unprecedented door-to-door outreach process.

To conduct the outreach, the consultant team hired 75 individuals from the community. These individuals were identified through the resources

gathered in the development of the PIP and through partnership with the Winston-Salem Urban League. The outreach team accepted the first 75 community members who showed up for a job and could pass a test that included the ability to read and write, describe the project correctly, answer project questions correctly, and use outreach techniques and sensitivities. Regarding project-related questions, survey staff were carefully instructed that they should not answer technical questions, but refer individuals to the variety of methods through which they could speak with a project engineer. This was important to be sure that technical questions were not answered incorrectly by someone without sufficient knowledge and to ensure that the same information was being shared across the community. All project messaging – including information conveyed by survey staff – had to follow the “3 Cs” – consistent, concise, and clear.

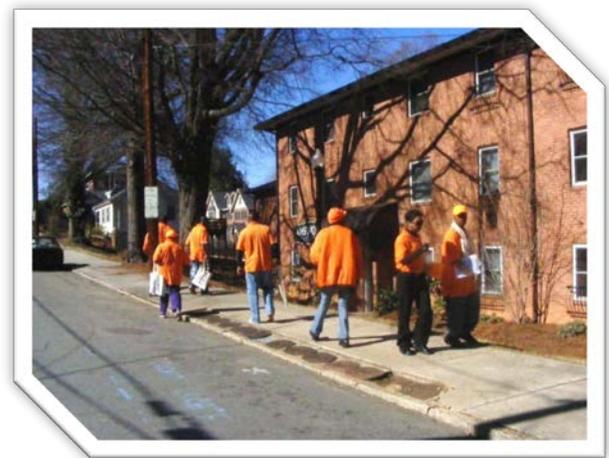


Figure 2. Survey staff for Business 40 wore orange jackets during the door-to-door survey so they could be easily recognized.

Practical Aspects of Conducting Door-to-Door Outreach Used for the Business 40 Project

- Taking the time to prepare the neighborhood for the survey reduced resident's fear and made them more likely to answer their door and talk with outreach staff. Prior to conducting the door-to-door survey, a plastic bag with project information and a notice that individuals would be circulating the area to conduct outreach was left on each door. A notice was also sent through a newsletter, newspaper articles, and interviews.
- All materials associated with the project, including clothing worn by the project team, pamphlets and flyers distributed, and bags with information left on doors were colored orange. This way, people in the community began associating orange with the project – it became familiar and alerted community members as to whom they could reach out to about the project or when they were receiving information.
- To ensure their safety, staff traveling door-to-door were instructed to “rattle gates” so that they would be aware of the presence of dogs. If they entered a home, staff left their project bag hanging on the outside of the front door – this way, another staff member circulating the area by van would know their whereabouts at all times and could check-in if they were inside for too long. All staff traveled in pairs and carried a cell phone.
- The outreach staff were a reflection of the project and NCDOT, so it was critical that they be courteous. Prior to conducting outreach, all staff were trained in basic courtesies.
- Because of project delays, the door-to-door outreach was conducted during daylight savings time. Since all outreach was conducted during daylight, this meant that the outreach team had two fewer hours each day for the outreach. This escalated (by more than double) the number of staff needed to complete the outreach.
- Survey staff were paid a relatively high hourly wage (\$13) for the type of work they were conducting. As the survey staff built experience, they become more efficient and effective. The goal was to ensure that staff would stick with the project, to avoid having to continually retrain new staff and lose that efficiency. As a result, turnover in survey staff was less than 10 percent.
- Spanish-speaking translators were made available to conduct surveys.
- A canvas bag branded with Business 40 project information was offered to every household that opened their door – regardless of whether they completed a survey. In addition to holding information about the project, the bag included information about important community services, and items like project magnets, pens, and other materials. These bags and other branded materials helped to spread the word about the project.



Figure 3. Canvas bags with the Business 40 branding were distributed during the surveys and used to indicate the location of survey staff.

Prior to knocking on doors, the core neighborhoods were prepped through a newsletter, newspaper articles, interviews, and materials left on doors that survey staff would be visiting, what they would look like (orange shirts), what information they would be collecting, and for what purpose.

When there was not an answer at a door, information was left indicating that the project team had visited, when (and between what hours) they would return, and other options for participating in the survey. Options included taking the survey through the project website,

over the phone with project staff, or by visiting the local project office.

The project team was inundated by community members interested in sharing their input through the survey process. Because of the level of interest and the length of time people wanted to talk, the survey period was extended. Ultimately, the door-to-door survey, performed by the trained outreach specialists, contacted more than 30,000 households in the Core Neighborhoods with a response rate of 42 percent. Surveys were collected at the end of each day and results were input into a database. This information was used to develop a summary of the transportation characteristics and issues disclosed by each neighborhood and served as a scoping document for further public outreach.

Corporate Intranet Surveys

Large corporations and governmental entities in the study area were asked to post the project survey on their Intranet to provide easy access to individuals who might be affected by the proposed improvements. Approximately 30 employers distributed surveys to their workers. A total of 1,777 responses were received. Responses were recorded in the project database.

Interchange Ramp Surveys

In an effort to contact the motorists/commuters that use Business 40 but do not reside in either the Core or Surrounding neighborhoods, an interchange ramp survey was conducted. Surveying was undertaken at each of the six interchanges located within the limits of the project. Surveying was completed during both morning and evening peak commuter hours. Motorists were stopped at the ends of the interchange off ramps. Drivers at each intersection were given a short three question

survey to complete and return by mail. Over 2,950 surveys were distributed, with more than 25 percent of them being returned. The responses for each survey were incorporated into the project database.



Figure 4. Interchange ramp surveys conducted for Business 40 in Winston-Salem, NC.

Surveys at Gathering Places

Surveys were also conducted from gathering places. For example, space was rented at the regional mall (Hanes Mall) the Friday after Thanksgiving (Black Friday). Project team members, dressed in the well-known orange, were stationed in the mall to conduct surveys. Surveys were also conducted at local churches following Wednesday fellowship dinners and Sunday services.

Responses from all of the surveys were captured in the project database. Addresses of respondents captured in the database were compared to project mapping using GIS. Residences within the Core Neighborhoods that did not participate in a survey were visited a second time.

Meetings

A variety of meetings were held within Core and Surrounding neighborhoods to provide project updates and solicit additional information from area residents and businesses. The meetings included presentations to stakeholders, neighborhood and corridor-wide meetings, and working groups.

Stakeholder Meetings

Stakeholder meetings were held on an as-needed basis – as determined by the project team or upon request, and generally included property or business owners, business or homeowners associations, special interest groups, religious organizations, neighborhood associations, police/fire personnel, and others as appropriate. These meetings generally involved a presentation at a group's regularly scheduled meeting, but could be specially arranged. To date, over 200 stakeholder meetings have been held.

Neighborhood Meetings

The Business 40 project held 14 neighborhood meetings with residents and stakeholders throughout the Core and Surrounding neighborhoods. These meetings had a combined attendance of over 200 residents. At these meetings, an overview of the Business 40 project and the preliminary findings of the door-to-door surveys were presented, and comments, questions, and/or concerns regarding the project were solicited.

Holding the neighborhood meetings after the door-to-door survey was part of the design of the public involvement plan to build from micro to macro. First, individual preferences were gathered through the survey, then neighborhood preferences, then corridor-wide preferences.

Results from each stage were shared to help participants understand the broad spectrum of feedback.

Corridor-Wide Meetings

Corridor-wide meetings were conducted at major project milestones or for specific topics and provided opportunities for the community to interact with the Business 40 project team and discuss project issues and recommendations. Lessons learned and effective practices from the I-70 East project in Colorado influenced the design of the corridor-wide meetings. During that project it was found that, in a typical open-house format, minority, low-income, limited English proficiency, and elderly participants often walk into an open house, look around, and leave without talking to any project staff or sharing their comments and thoughts. The Business 40 corridor-wide meetings were designed using the concept of church ice cream socials to help the general public interact with the engineers and to feel comfortable at discussion tables.

Two sets of corridor-wide meetings have been held for the Business 40 project. These meetings were held at three locations that were selected to enable residents from each part of Winston-Salem to be able to attend a meeting close to their home or place of work. One meeting was held around lunchtime, while the other two were held in the afternoon/evening to make them convenient for Core and Surrounding neighborhoods, suburban and downtown residents, and downtown employees to attend.

The first set of meetings, held in June 2008, was attended by approximately 700 people. The objective of these meetings was to present the results of the community outreach surveys and



Figure 5. Meeting for Business 40 in the East Winston neighborhood.

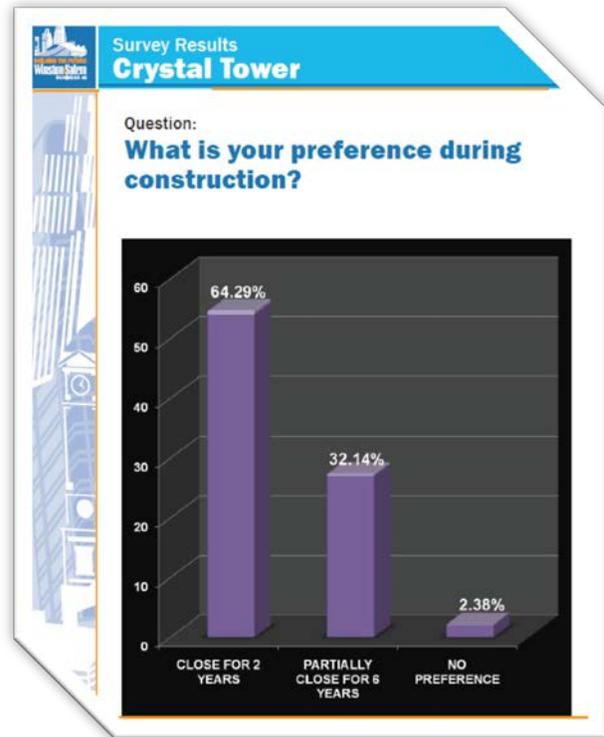


Figure 6. Representative board used at neighborhood meetings to display door-to-door survey results.



Figure 7. A meal was provided at each corridor-wide meeting. Outreach staff recorded conversations about the project.



Figure 8. Daycare at a corridor-wide meeting

preliminary traffic modeling to the public, and to provide an opportunity for the public to voice their concerns and suggest issues that could be discussed at one of the issue group meetings conducted during the corridor wide meeting. General concerns expressed by the community included detours/alternate routes, possible ramp closures, possible street closures, and progress on proposed improvements to US 52.

Practical Tips for Corridor-Wide Meetings from the Business 40 Project

The following design and methods were used for the Business 40 corridor-wide meetings to encourage meaningful participation:

- Take care of people – treat them as you would guests in your home.
- Greet visitors at the entrance. Do not allow guests to sign-in themselves – write down their information for them so that guests with low-literacy are not made to feel awkward.
- Use a concierge to guide guests through the meeting – show guests where to start, what they will see, information they should gather, people they should talk to.
- Get project staff out of their suits and ties - have them dress in a project brand (orange for Business 40). Do not use titles on name tags.
- Set up the meeting space in a snake formation so that guests weave through all information before reaching the end.
- Use friendly/large-print project information boards.
- Provide a meal. While guests are dining, encourage and record conversations about project-related topics.
- Provide licensed and bonded daycare in an area that is visible to parents attending the meeting.
- Ask people how they want to be contacted in the future – and use that method.

The second set of corridor-wide meetings was held in October 2010. These meetings presented new design options for the project to the general public, as well as options on how to be involved with the development of the design alternatives. A total of 325 residents attended the meetings over 3 days. General comments received at the corridor-wide meetings focused on interchange/ramp access, street connectivity, and concern about possible property acquisitions.

Working Groups

The Working Groups, which are ongoing, consist of local citizens that want to be more involved in the project. They are designed to allow smaller group discussion of project topics with the local community. The groups are divided into three major topics as a result of the suggestions submitted by the public. The initial discussion topics were suggested by residents, business owners, corridor stakeholders, and NCDOT project participants. The working groups are the Bridge and Design Group, the Traffic Group, and the Community Issues Group.

Each working group covers multiple topics such as community impacts, interchanges, alternate routes, bike/pedestrian/open space, economic development and trucking/motor carriers. Each group discusses issues and approaches to various project concerns. Members of the project team facilitate the meetings to ensure the group achieves each meeting's stated goal. Meeting notices and meeting minutes are posted on the project website, and meetings are open to anyone.

Printed Materials and Other Media

Project Website

The project website (www.business40nc.com) is being used to disseminate information and provide a schedule of events. The site includes English and Spanish options and includes features such as an on-line feedback form. The website is updated by the project team on a regular basis with the intent of providing real-time project information.

Newspaper Advertising

Advertisements have been and will continue to be placed in weekly newspapers, the *Winston-Salem Journal*, the *Winston-Salem Chronicle*, *Qué Pasa*, and other relevant local publications to announce meetings and other important study information.

Newsletters and Mailing

Newsletters and mailings are used to provide project status updates and information. They are mailed to those people on the project mailing list and distributed to the Core Neighborhoods at critical points during the project. Business 40 newsletters and mailings are printed in English and Spanish.

Flyers and Posters

Flyers were used throughout the first phase of the outreach process. They preceded door-to-door visits and community meetings (neighborhood and corridor). Typically, flyers were distributed within one week of meetings and provided meeting specifics or announced the upcoming surveying. Flyers were printed in both English and Spanish. The local transit agency was asked to place flyers on their buses, and local grocery stores were asked to place flyers in grocery bags. Barber shops and beauty

salons were asked if flyers could be given to their customers. Additionally, permission was sought from recreation centers, neighborhood restaurants and businesses to leave flyers announcing the door-to-door survey outreach efforts or later the neighborhood and corridor-wide meetings.

Posters were only used for the corridor-wide meetings and were placed throughout the corridor in neighborhood gathering places such as libraries, recreation centers, economic centers and small businesses (i.e. barber shops, liquor stores, beauty salons, drug stores, and similar locations.).

Radio

Radio outreach provides low-cost access to information. Opportunities were pursued for NCDOT to participate in call-in shows. Public service announcements were produced for the project in English and Spanish. Public service announcements were used at the beginning of the initial outreach phase to announce the door-to-door efforts and later to announce the corridor-wide meetings.

Television

Opportunities for interview format shows were pursued on both free and cable channels. The channels for both the City of Winston-Salem and the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Public Schools were contacted and NCDOT personnel were made available for interviews.

Next Steps

The results of the surveys and initial stakeholder, corridor-wide, and neighborhood meetings revealed a strong preference (67.3 percent) from within the community for the two-year full closure option. This result was not what was expected after talking with the

Business 40 Public Involvement Overview

A variety of techniques were used to ensure meaningful involvement from the community. The outreach process was designed to be personal and extensive. It began at a one-on-one level and expanded to bring together the many interests in the corridor. A variety of opportunities were made available for the community to get involved and stay informed about the project. These include:

- Hiring residents from the neighborhoods to help share project information.
- Conducting and requiring extensive training for anyone interacting with the public.
- Using flyers to notify residences and businesses of meetings.
- Conducting door-to-door outreach as a first contact in many neighborhoods.
- Attending neighborhood association meetings and business meetings.
- Conducting neighborhood meetings.
- Involving the media in a proactive manner.
- Conducting outreach in local shopping areas during periods of peak usage.

Chamber of Commerce and other community leaders during initial information gathering, and proved the importance of going out into the community.

The outreach tools and techniques continue to be implemented on the Business 40 Project for the ongoing environmental study. The public involvement program has allowed, and will continue to allow, the community to help determine how the Business 40 improvements are planned, designed, and constructed.

Continued engagement of the public through workshops, neighborhood meetings, and working group meetings will help NCDOT identify and address potential community impacts throughout the project development process.

Effective Practices and Lessons Learned

Many of the effective strategies and tools for working with the public in the course of an environmental study are described within this case. Some of the effective principles guiding these methods are described here.

Seek and apply information from similar situations. The initial public outreach and the resulting decision to close Business 40 for two years during construction may have been different without the ACTT conference convened at the outset of the project. Hearing effective practices from experts who had applied them in similar situations across the country provided critical help for NCDOT to conduct this project in a new and extraordinary way that diverged from the agency's standard operating procedures.

Use experienced public involvement professionals to design and guide the public involvement process and to serve as the main interface with the public. The reality is that not everyone is "a people person". A skilled transportation engineer may not be the best person to put in the position of explaining a transportation project to the public, or to gather feedback from them. The success of the outreach effort conducted in support of the Business 40 project was due largely to the level of experience of the outreach team. With an effort of this scale, there were always moving pieces. The outreach team always had to be ready for something to go wrong. Because of

Who Was Reached – Statistics from Business 40 Public Outreach

The eight-month survey process conducted between 2007 and 2008, resulted in the following:

- 12,367 individuals were interviewed one-on-one at homes, churches, schools, shopping centers, and businesses;
- 149 downtown business CEOs and managers were interviewed;
- 1,517 downtown employees, commuters and government workers attended lobby fairs and were interviewed;
- 1,774 intranet surveys with employees of large employers were completed;
- 538 neighborhood business employers in the Core Neighborhoods (those that touched Business 40) were surveyed;
- 1,261 commuters and/or visitors were interviewed at Hanes Mall and at shops along Hanes Boulevard; and
- 592 ramp survey postcards were returned from ramp surveys.

As a result of these efforts 67.3 percent of the 11,950 people completing surveys preferred the construction option that would close Business 40 for two years over the construction option of partially closing Business 40 for six years.

their experience, the outreach team was able to position themselves, prepare for, and minimize any issues that arose.

Spend the time needed to train and prepare all staff who will interact with the public. At times, it was important that other specialists interact with the public. In these cases the

specialists were guided by the outreach team in their interactions. The purpose was to ensure that all members of the project team who interacted with public have and share a consistent, concise, and clear message.

For the door-to-door survey, the individuals hired from the community were also trained in the messages to be conveyed, courtesies in their interactions, and the methods for recording feedback received.

Do not assume that you understand the community's values, perspective, and preferences. Project decisions cannot be made based on the assumptions of a community's values, perspective, and preferences. These things cannot be learned behind a computer – through the collection of Census data, identification of community resources, and review of land use plans. Even talking to community leaders is not enough – it requires going out into the community with a broad and deep reach, to listen directly to the public. This principle was proven in the early outreach conducted for Business 40. The expectation was that the public would favor a six-year partial closure of the roadway for construction over a two-year complete closure. The results of hands-on outreach proved that this was not the case.

Use approaches and strategies aimed at making the public comfortable and willing to provide input. The project team went to extensive effort to make the public comfortable and willing to provide input to the project. Many of these strategies are called out in the sidebars, “Practical Aspects of Conducting Door-to-Door Outreach Used for the Business 40 Project” and “Practical Tips for Corridor-Wide Meetings from the Business 40 Project.”

Some of these included: giving the public advance notice that a survey would be conducted, using the same bright color for all project materials, training all staff who interacted with the public, treating the public with respect and courtesy, and using a variety of methods for outreach.

Open and ongoing communication among branches of the project team is critical. One of the triggers for the extraordinary public involvement supporting the Business 40 project was the familiarity of the Division Engineer with the project area and his ability to communicate a need to NCDOT headquarters and have it supported. Without that awareness and communication, a different approach may have been used, the six-year construction design approach may have been taken, and discontent on the part of the public could have caused slow-downs. This line of communication and support was an effective practice. There were instances of and lessons learned around lack of communication. The outreach team maintained a database of feedback received from the public during the survey and meeting process. That database was shared with NCDOT on a weekly basis, but the right people within the agency were not receiving and making use of this great data. The issue was corrected, but demonstrates the importance of setting up lines of communication within the agency and the various branches that will serve the project.

Having a dedicated agency project manager on site is important for this level of outreach. The project had an extensive level of outreach and a very large project team on the ground during the first year of the project. NCDOT's project manager was located out of its headquarters an hour and a half away. The

project manager was responsible for many other projects. This created challenges for a fast-paced, dynamic process such as this one. Having a dedicated on-site project manager would have made the process much more efficient and effective.

The contract vehicle is important. One effective practice that may often go overlooked was the contract vehicle used to support the public involvement process. NCDOT arranged for a task order contract with the consultants providing outreach support. It provides the flexibility to change course quickly without having to scope out everything years in advance. Money is approved by the Board of Transportation without a detailed scope. Then small scopes can be written, estimates negotiated, and the firms given notice to proceed quickly as the need arises.

Benefits

For the Community

Tremendous benefits for the community resulted from the outreach conducted in support of the Business 40 environmental study. The view of NCDOT and their consultant team was long-term – they wanted to leave the community better-off because of the study and the project.

A specific point was made to put project funds back into the community. Seventy-five individuals in need of work from within the community were hired to support outreach. These individuals received a wage, and in many cases, the leadership skills and training that would help them acquire future work. All food that was purchased for survey staff and to serve during meetings came from “mom and pop” type establishments within the community, as did other services and materials.

Through the outreach process, the community has and continues to meaningfully participate in the Business 40 environmental study. Their preferences will be reflected in the identification and selection of alternatives, design, and construction approach.

For the Agency

The outcome of the early public outreach efforts – the selection of two-year construction design – will save NCDOT time and monetary resources. In addition, through involving the public to this extent, the agency expects to avoid disproportionately high and adverse impacts to environmental justice populations, and other issues that could slow project development.

Community Enhancement through Transportation Project Development

The public involvement plan was designed to build community and capacity. The goal was to teach people new skills, put money into the community, and teach stakeholders about the project. This approach built goodwill for NCDOT. For example:

- 75 individuals from the community were hired to serve as outreach staff for the Business 40 project. Staff were paid a wage and, in many cases, learned new skills that could be used for future employment.
- Meals and daycare were provided at all corridor meetings. Businesses within Winston-Salem were used to provide these services.
- Whenever possible, materials and equipment were purchased or rented from within Winston-Salem.

Most importantly, the extensive public outreach has enhanced NCDOT's reputation and built needed trust with the local community.

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