

Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About Mapping Tools



What are Mapping Tools?

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. The same goes for maps. Maps provide an opportunity to share data in unique ways. They allow information to be communicated in a visual format, making it easier for the public to digest complicated data in a concise, clear format.

Beyond simply displaying information, mapping tools typically have interactive capabilities that permit users to search, click, and query their way across a specific project site, neighborhood, or region to gather details that may not be easily accessible in other formats. Some tools allow individuals to share comments or ideas directly on a map they can access from their mobile phones, tablets, or computers.

Integrating mapping tools into the planning and project development process can be a powerful way to communicate information and collect feedback and preferences from the public.

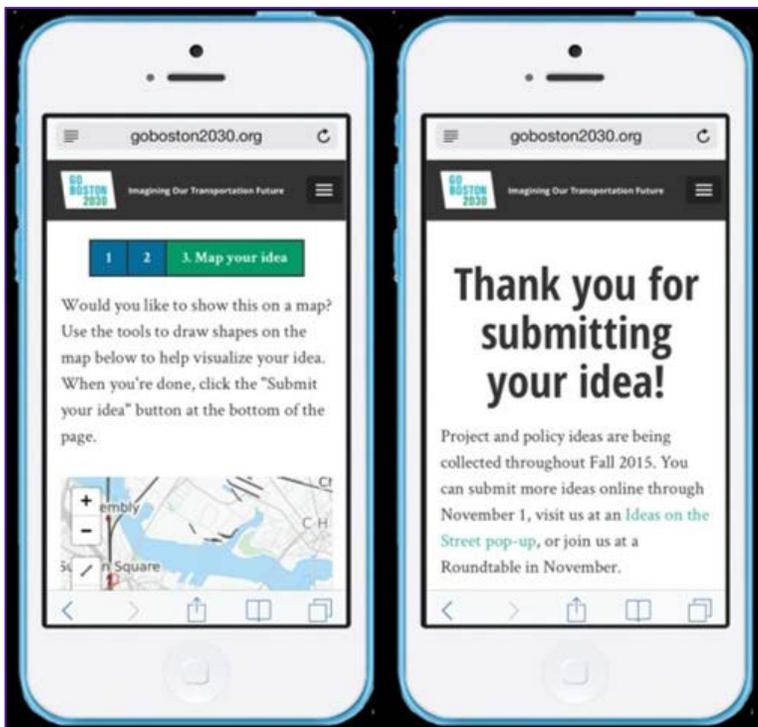


Image courtesy of Boston Transportation Department (BTD)

VPI in Practice

As part of its long-range transportation planning process, *Go Boston 2030*, the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) invested in a web tool that allowed users to share their ideas as either written concepts or by drawing lines or shapes directly on a map. The tool was optimized for both desktop and mobile browsers.



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Can Mapping Tools Help My Agency?

Engaging with stakeholders during the transportation planning and project development process is not only required, it's the right thing to do for the public good. Community members want to understand how tax dollars are being invested, and residents have unique perspectives and insights about the places where they live,

work, and visit.

Mapping tools are an excellent way to show the public where funds are being spent or are expected to be spent. Agencies can embed maps directly into websites or mobile apps, giving the public the ability to search for information at their convenience. Thus, users can more easily digest information and understand where investments are being made.

Transportation agencies can also include options to submit comments, ideas, or questions. For example, when developing its Transportation Improvement Program, the Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) used an interactive map to show proposed projects and asked users to complete a survey to help prioritize projects for funding. AAMPO found that this approach increased participation by up to 500 percent.



How Can My Agency Start Using Mapping Tools?

Many options are available to integrate mapping tools into the planning and project development process. There are some free, user-friendly versions of mapping applications with simple data analysis and visualization capabilities that agencies can explore and pilot. Subscription-based mapping applications provide a greater range of services. For example, story maps allow agencies to combine maps with narratives, images, and videos.

VPI in Practice

During the *Go Boston 2030* effort, BTD developed an online database that organized all ideas by zip code. Users were then able to go to BTD's website and click through an interactive map to review all submitted ideas. The public was able to express support for ideas by clicking "like." The results from this outreach effort directly influenced the four future scenarios BTD developed as part of its planning process.

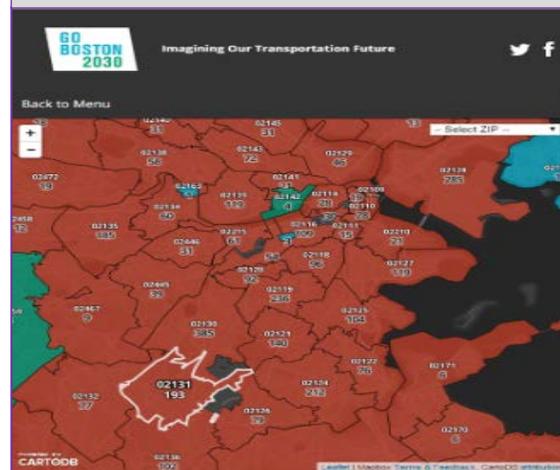


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TAKE NOTE...

- Maps can communicate data in unique and interesting ways
- Agencies may already have in-house, web-based mapping or GIS capabilities
- Agencies can share maps on their websites, through social media, and at in-person meetings and events

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