



Online in the Field



OVERVIEW:

As more transportation agencies rely on virtual public involvement tools such as online surveys, questions arise about how best to include people without internet access in the outreach process. While some agencies rely on traditional efforts such as using paper surveys at in-person meetings, others take their virtual tools directly to places where people gather. Examples include bringing tablets or laptops to senior centers, libraries, or pop-up outreach locations such as community events. Agencies can also target users of specific transportation modes, for example, by conducting tablet-based outreach at bus stops.

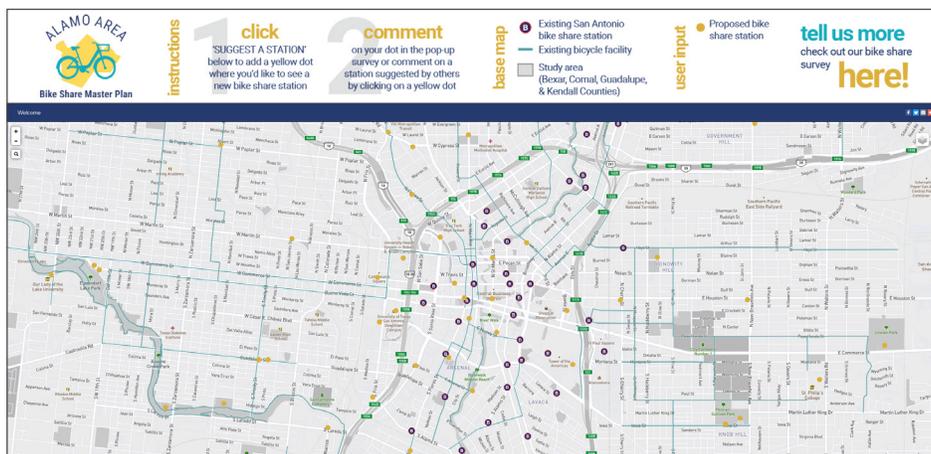
BEST SUITED FOR:

Planning Products and Projects, All Phases

CASE STUDIES:

Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, Regional Bikeshare Master Plan

The Alamo Area MPO used tablet-based outreach for its Regional Bikeshare Master Plan. Residents could respond to an online survey and a crowdsourcing map on tablets at targeted community events. During the San Antonio “Siclovía,” a cycling event, a team of six people conducted intercept surveys with bike riders. The survey was available in both English and Spanish. The results were combined with those who took the survey on the MPO’s website and helped the MPO identify locations for future bikeshare stations.



The Alamo Area MPO created an interactive map and survey for their Bikeshare Master Plan. These tools were available on the MPO website, as well as on tablets at various community events. Image courtesy of Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization, Transportation Improvement Plan and Metropolitan Transportation Plan

The Broward MPO conducts tablet-based outreach for a variety of planning products, including the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). An interactive TIP map allows residents to view the projects that are programmed for the area where they live. During preparation of the Commitment



CASE STUDIES cont...

2045 MTP update, staff sought opportunities to conduct an MTP survey at libraries and special events, such as bike safety and helmet fitting sessions. The MPO has found that libraries are a good place to connect with older adults, environmental justice populations, and families.

Broward MPO takes their online public engagement directly to libraries, city halls and other gathering places. Safety events help draw interest and yield new participants for online surveys. Image courtesy of Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization.



Snapshot



Resources Required

- Tablets, laptops, or other portable devices
- Hotspot technologies such as wi-fi pucks for areas with limited internet connectivity
- Staff time to plan and conduct outreach events



Outcomes

- More inclusive, representative input in virtual public involvement activities
- Bridge the digital divide



Tips for Success

- Keep surveys short (2 minutes or less)
- Make sure surveys or other virtual feedback tools display properly on mobile devices
- Ensure internet access (if needed) and charging capability
- Use protective cases for tablets, and consider using hand grips; in a busy environment, consider using cables to tether devices for security
- Avoid sun glare during outdoor events
- Bring paper surveys or other hard copy materials as a backup
- Include staff with multi-lingual capability where needed
- Train staff prior to events



Advantages

- Helps address the “digital divide” by enabling participation by persons with little or no personal internet access, those with limited computer experience, and rural dwellers with limited broadband service
- Flexible; allows impromptu use as staff travel to meetings and events
- Direct contact between agencies and the public helps to build trust and familiarity
- Allows for timely collection, organization, and categorization of public comments



Disadvantages

- Can involve more initial preparation than a paper-based survey or mapping exercise
- Requires purchase or rental of mobile devices, such as laptops or tablets

