Chesapeake
BAY CROSSING STUDY
TIER 2 NEPA



Public Engagement Plan

SPRING 2025

MDTA
Maryland Transportation Authority

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INTRODUCTION



The Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are following a two-tiered National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the Bay Crossing Study. The Chesapeake Bay Crossing Study: Tier 1 NEPA ("Tier 1 Study") resulted in the identification of Corridor 7, the two miles wide and approximately 22 miles long Corridor containing the existing Chesapeake Bay Bridge, as the Selected Corridor Alternative. In June 2022, the MDTA launched the Chesapeake Bay Crossing Study: Tier 2 NEPA (Tier 2 Study). Public engagement activities to support the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Tier 2 Study build upon the extensive outreach efforts that were undertaken for the Tier 1 Study. Active engagement by key stakeholders and the general public has been and will continue to be essential throughout the Tier 2 Study.

The Public Engagement Plan (PEP) presents a community engagement approach for the Tier 2 Study. It is intended to illustrate procedures for how the MDTA will engage with project stakeholders and the general public throughout the Tier 2 Study process. The PEP serves as a living document that outlines the process and practices for the Tier 2 Study and will be updated as necessary.

PLAN PURPOSE

The goal of the Tier 2 Study PEP is to provide a framework for the outreach tools, methods and engagement opportunities that will be provided throughout the duration of the project. While it is important to document public engagement activities as required by NEPA, the opportunity for inclusive and transparent two-way communication also improves a project's development and overall design and supports a fair transportation outcome.

This plan outlines the process and tools that will allow stakeholders and the larger public to engage in meaningful ways, with multiple opportunities to provide feedback and input to inform the transportation decision-making process.

This PEP highlights public engagement that proactively seeks full community representation, public comment and feedback, and incorporation of that feedback into a project, program, or plan when possible. The Tier 2 Study team has identified the following elements that will guide and promote public engagement:

- Understanding community demographics and involving broad representation of community;
- Building durable community relationships;
- Understanding community wants and needs;

- Using community preferred engagement techniques and
- Documenting and sharing community impacts on decisions.

It is MDTA's objective to advance transportation alternatives that address transportation mobility, accessibility, and affordability across the Bay and create a fair transportation outcome based on the identified needs and concerns. Strategies will include determining reasonable transportation alternatives that can be implemented as part of the Tier 2 Study that will lead to a fair balance of benefit and burden by involving protected populations to ensure no discrimination in access to information based on race, color, national origin, limited English proficiency, religion, age, or disability individuals, groups and communities in a meaningful review of the options for input.

FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS AND OBJECTIVES

The Tier 2 Study team has identified the following foundational elements and associated objectives to guide and promote public engagement.



Understand community demographics & involve broad representation of community

- The Tier 2 Study Corridor contains numerous diverse communities. A key component of the team's outreach efforts will be to identify and understand unique populations within the Study Corridor. The PEP will be refined to ensure all communities are afforded access to Study information and are offered opportunities to learn about the Study and provide comments for consideration.
- **Key Objectives:**
    - Identify and categorize stakeholder groups and maintain a stakeholder list for each group, to be updated throughout the Study and
    - Ensure that protected populations, including individuals of every race, color, national origin, religion, age, or disability, as well as those with limited English proficiency, have an equal opportunity to comment on and participate in Tier 2 Study activities, and support all aspects of the NEPA analyses, as appropriate.



Build durable community relationships

- A core goal for the Tier 2 Study PEP is to build durable community relationships. This goal recognizes the need to build community and stakeholder trust by demonstrating proactive engagement of communities and consideration of all public comments.
- **Key Objectives:**
    - Provide regular and meaningful updates on Study progress and milestones to all stakeholders;

- Coordinate informative and engaging public meetings that both present materials and provide the public an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments;
- Identify and work with active voices in communities to ensure the MDTA is effectively communicating the messaging associated with the Study and
- Provide additional opportunities for community engagement throughout the Tier 2 Study process beyond the formal public meetings.

Understand community wants and needs

This process must be grounded in the goal of understanding the needs and desires of the community. In order to achieve this goal, it is critical to provide multiple opportunities throughout the duration of the Study for the public to provide feedback. In addition to in-person and virtual public open houses, virtual listening tours, and meetings with local community and stakeholder groups (upon request), the Study team will accept and consider public input received through various mediums throughout the duration of the Study.

Key Objectives:

- Understand stakeholder concerns as early as possible through comments, feedback, and discussions;
- Strive to provide an effective approach for considering and responding to public and stakeholder comments during the Tier 2 Study environmental review process and
- Solicit stakeholder input to inform the Study team as they identify and screen alternatives and ultimately recommend a preferred alternative within the Tier 2 Study Corridor.

Use community preferred engagement techniques

It is important to employ multiple methods to distribute Study updates, obtain community input, and announce virtual and in-person open houses and additional public engagement opportunities. This will assure broad engagement and solicit input from diverse populations of public and key stakeholders.

Key Objectives:

- Analyze audiences, their interests, and potential tools for reaching those audiences;
- Identify creative and varied communication tools and accommodations best suited to meaningfully engage each audience;
- Solicit feedback from audiences on the effectiveness and preference of communication tools used and

- Ensure these preferred methods are used throughout the Study to reach and meaningfully engage stakeholders.



- Demonstrate transparency and accountability in the development of the decision-making process.
- **Key Objectives:**
  - Post all comments received on the Study website;
  - Summarize and provide responses to public feedback received during official comment periods;
  - Document outreach efforts in the NEPA EIS and supporting documentation and clearly describe how public input affected the results of this effort and
  - Document outreach to protected populations to ensure no discrimination in access to information based on race, color, national origin, limited English proficiency, religion, age, or disability (consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act) and stakeholders with clear metrics and comments from this engagement.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Identify and Categorize Stakeholders

In addition to the geographic and community diversity present in the approximately 22-mile-long Study corridor, the PEP must reach additional audiences and stakeholders. The following provides the approach for identifying and reaching those individuals and organizations within the Study Corridor.

Approach Includes:

- Identify and categorize stakeholders and maintain an up-to-date stakeholders list;
- Identify outreach opportunities throughout the Study Corridor, including protected populations to ensure no discrimination in access to information based on race, color, national origin, limited English proficiency, religion, age, or disability communities and
- Identify outreach methods, tools, and themes, and determine how to deliver messaging throughout the Study.

Stakeholders Include:

- General public;
- Protected populations to ensure no discrimination in access to information based on race, color, national origin, limited English proficiency, religion, age, or disability;
- Persons who live in rural areas;
- Youth and students;
- 65 and older populations;

- Veterans;
- Commuters;
- Motorists within the corridor;
- Public and private transportation service users and providers;
- Trucking industry;
- Conservation groups;
- Transportation advocacy organizations;
- Users of the Chesapeake Bay;
- Individual property owners;
- Communities - including populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographically bound populations;
- Civic organizations;
- Social services;
- Business community;
- Large employers;
- Schools;
- Places of worship;
- Elected officials;
- Local, State and federal government agencies;
- Special interest groups (i.e. Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group (BBRAG)) and
- Media.

Develop Key Messaging

Key messages are helpful to assure that those who communicate about the Tier 2 Study can describe it in an authentic, consistent, and compelling manner, in public outreach materials, in Study presentations, and to local media. While messaging may evolve as the Tier 2 Study progresses, communicating consistent and intentional messaging will reinforce how information regarding the Study is understood and remembered.

Key messaging will be prepared based on Study milestones, including, but not limited to:

- Project Initiation;
- Purpose and Need;
- Preliminary Alternatives Development;
- Proposed Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS);
- Scoping for EIS;
- Evaluation of the ARDS;
- The MDTA Recommended Preferred Alternative and
- Selected Alternative.

Stakeholder Engagement

Throughout the course of the Study, the team will use a variety of mechanisms to engage both stakeholders and the public as well as to solicit feedback and input. These mechanisms include:

Website

- Develop and maintain a dedicated webpage at Baycrossingstudy.com;
- Post project schedule, schedule of engagement events, and project updates;
- Prepare Public Open House materials and summary documents and post to the Study website;
- Post all public comments received to the Study website, with personal information redacted prior to posting and
- Provide an ADA-compliant website available in multiple languages.

Project Materials

- Develop Study materials utilizing visualization techniques and graphics templates to support consistent user-friendly look, feel, and messaging;
- Provide comment cards and/or surveys at meetings and at community events, with electronic comment forms additionally available;
- Provide updates through press releases, social media, eblasts, website updates, and paid media ads (electronic and print), as appropriate, including key milestone updates and meeting announcements;
- Develop a series of short videos to share information on specific themes or topics throughout the course of the Study;
- Provide translated materials in Spanish. Translation to other languages will be prepared based on identified audience demographics and
- Provide translators for Spanish, ASL and/or other languages at Open Houses and Hearings, as requested.

Elected Official, Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group (BBRAG) and News Media Outreach

- Briefings with elected and government officials;
- Press Releases;
- Media Kits - Graphics, Advertisements, Digital Toolkit, Website;
- Project updates at quarterly live streamed BBRAG Open Meetings and
- Advanced notification of project announcements.

Consulting Party Coordination

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) is a federal law governing stewardship of our nation's cultural heritage. Section 106 of the NHPA, as amended (54 United States Code [U.S.C.] 306108), establishes a process for considering a project's effects on historic properties. As part of the process, the MDTA will consider the views of "Consulting Parties" who are organizations and individuals invited to learn about the study and provide their views.

Federally Recognized Tribes, government agencies, and other preservation organizations have been invited to participate as Consulting Parties in the Section 106 process for the Tier 2 Study. Coordination with consulting parties includes:

- Meet at least four times throughout the Study to share information;
- Provide Section 106 consultation materials for review and
- Receive views and input related to historic properties from the consulting parties.

Interested Party Coordination

- Conduct interest group briefings;
- Provide opportunities for interested parties to comment via the website, by email, traditional mail, or phone messages throughout the Study's duration and
- Coordinate with potentially impacted property owners as alternatives are developed and screened, and as access to property is needed.

Public Meetings/Events

- Open Houses (virtual and in-person);
- Public Hearings;
- Virtual listening events;
- Grassroots Outreach: flyers at local community centers, local government assistance offices, grocery stores, places of worship; bus and transit advertisements; sending information to local government offices for distribution to constituents; informational materials/stands at farmer's markets, local festivals; informational materials at other MDOT project event tables/booths and
- Meeting with local community and stakeholder groups upon request.

Media Plan

The Bay Crossing Media Plan for the announcement of the public meetings includes:

- Public Notifications: email to elected officials, BBRAG, project email list, MDTA's gov.delivery platform, text to MDTA's gov.delivery platform; website update; social media posts; press release;
- Postcard Mailers to mailing list and to the carrier routes that touch the two-mile wide study corridor;
- Digital Toolkits to include graphics, banners and advertisements: shared with MDOT partners to share on their websites and social media accounts;
- Video updates and
- List of print and digital publications for advertising including cost and dates.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES BY KEY PROJECT MILESTONES

Key Milestone(s)	Major Activities and Messaging
Project Initiation (June 2022)	• Public Open House #1 – in-person September 7 and 8; virtual September 13, 2022 o Initiation of Tier 2 Study o Summary of Tier 1 Study Results o Describe Objectives of Tier 2 Study o Study Timeline o Request public input on various Study factors, including: o individual travel patterns and use of the existing Bay Bridge, o when and where users experience congestion on the existing Bay Bridge, o potential needs for the Tier 2 Study and o how attendees learned about the Open Houses. o Posting of Public Open House Summary
Purpose and Need; Preliminary Alternatives Development (April 2023 through October 2024)	• Virtual Public Listening Meeting, focused on transit and bicycle/pedestrian facilities in the Study Area – June 27, 2023 • Stakeholder Engagement Letters • Virtual Study Corridor Tour (video) • Grassroots Outreach at Community Events and Community Centers • Public Open House #2 – in-person September 7 and 12; virtual September 14, 2023 o What the MDTA heard o Purpose and Need elements o Preliminary Alternatives o Study timeline o Screening criteria to identify proposed Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS) o Importance of public input
Scoping for EIS; Proposed Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study (November to December 2024)	• Notice of Intent Published –November 2024 • Public Open House #3 – Virtual December 4; in-person December 9 and 11, 2024 o Scoping meetings o What the MDTA heard o Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Scoping o Feedback on proposed ARDS o Screening alternatives to determine Selected Alternative o Study timeline • Continued Grassroots Outreach at Community Events and Community Centers
The MDTA Recommended Preferred Alternative (November to December 2025)	• Notice of Availability for the of DEIS Available for Public Comment o The DEIS will have a 45-day public comment period • Public Hearings for Public Testimony (in-person and virtual); Hearings to occur 15-30 after the DEIS is available for public and agency review o How the MDTA Recommended Preferred Alternative was identified o Public testimony on the MDTA Recommended Preferred Alternative and DEIS
Selected Alternative (November 2026)	• Notice of Availability of FEIS/ROD - • Selected Alternative • Public notification