

# Draft 2026 MTC Public Participation Plan for the San Francisco Bay Area

## Guiding Principles for Engagement

MTC's guiding principles for engagement serve as our vision for public participation and are rooted in our mission to advance equity in the Bay Area by investing resources in engagement strategies that lift the voices of those who have been historically left out of the decision-making process, and working to ensure historically underserved populations can meaningfully influence decision-making.

**1. Effective engagement has a clear purpose.**

Defining the purpose for engaging the public, understanding the context and identifying the audience of those affected is imperative to ensure meaningful engagement from the standpoint of the agency and the participants.

**2. Effective engagement requires two-way education and relationship building.**

Acknowledging the expertise that exists within a given community and boosting engagement with activities that increase mutual education fosters more productive conversations. Ongoing, mutual education improves outcomes and requires cultivating relationships with partners and communities to build trust and achieve consensus.

**3. Effective engagement is not one-size-fits-all.**

Efforts must be tailored to each unique project and audience to enhance community engagement while making every effort to increase participation opportunities for those most impacted by past and current decisions.

**4. Clear communication is essential in effective engagement.**

Public engagement must be conducted through clear and compelling communications that are appropriate for the intended audience. Leveraging inclusive storytelling builds shared understanding.

**5. Effective engagement demands accountability.**

Informing the public of opportunities to participate in the process and clearly demonstrating how community voices have influenced planning and policy decisions builds confidence in the public process.

**6. Engagement requires openness and transparency.**

An open and transparent public participation process empowers low-income communities and communities of color to participate in decision-making that affects them (adopted as an environmental justice principle by the Commission in 2006).

## Engagement Framework

Our engagement framework describes the iterative process MTC follows when implementing public engagement programs and activities, and guides *how* we conduct engagement.

### Framework Element 1: Coordinate Engagement Efforts Across the Agency to Reduce Engagement Fatigue

MTC recognizes that residents, community-based organizations and partner agencies are often asked to participate in multiple overlapping outreach efforts across plans, programs and decision points. As a prerequisite for engagement, and to reduce “engagement fatigue” and improve the quality of participation, MTC will strengthen internal coordination, so engagement requests are better timed, more clearly connected to decisions, and less duplicative across teams and projects.

### Framework Element 2: Communicate Early and Often

MTC structures major planning initiatives and funding decisions to provide the public with many opportunities to help shape outcomes. MTC provides timely information to raise awareness of upcoming projects, key milestones and opportunities to influence policy development and decision-making processes.

### Framework Element 3: Enable Access for All

MTC works to provide all Bay Area residents with opportunities for meaningful participation, regardless of ability, age or income. This strategy aims to increase activities that reach communities who have been historically left out of policy decisions that affect them. Further, MTC recognizes that individuals should not need to be transportation professionals to understand our work.

### Framework Element 4: Prioritize Co-creation and Plain Language

MTC aims to conduct engagement activities that design and create solutions in partnership and collaboration with communities affected by policies and decisions. MTC strives to create clear content to foster informed, productive dialogue throughout the engagement process.

### Framework Element 5: Respond and Report Back

MTC is committed to summarizing comments heard from participants on impending actions, so decision-makers and the public have a clear understanding of the depth and breadth of opinions on a given issue. MTC also strives to report back on how input informed staff analysis and decisions — and, when outcomes do not align with comments received, to explain why.

To remain effective when comment channels receive high-volume, duplicative or automated submissions (including template or AI-generated messages), MTC will organize input to identify unique issues and ideas, distinguish form/duplicate messages from substantive individualized comments, and document both volume and content in a transparent manner.

### Framework Element 6: Assess Impact

MTC evaluates our engagement activities in an effort to inform and improve future engagement. Evaluation helps determine who was missing from the process and identifies opportunities for improvement and corrective action.