

MTC ABAG Community Advisory Council

June 5, 2026

Agenda Item 6.a.

Public Engagement Program and Draft 2026 Public Participation Plan

Subject:

Provide an overview of the draft 2026 MTC Public Participation Plan for the San Francisco Bay Area and how MTC involves the public and partners in regional decisions, guided by the Public Participation Plan.

Background:

MTC's policies and investments affect how people move, how communities grow and how the region responds to challenges like safety, affordability, climate change and resilience. To ensure the decisions MTC makes are informed by the real-world experience and priorities of Bay Area residents, MTC is committed to an open process where the public can learn about issues, share lived experience and provide input that informs the agency's recommendations and actions.

As the Bay Area's Metropolitan Planning Organization, MTC helps set regional priorities that affect daily life in the Bay Area, so it is important that MTC communicates in a way that helps the public understand what is being considered, provides the public an opportunity to weigh in early and communicates how public input is used. To this end, MTC's engagement efforts have historically included collaboration with community-based organizations (CBOs), supported through efforts such as the Community Action Resource and Engagement (CARE) program, to deepen engagement with historically underserved communities.

MTC is required to adopt a Public Participation Plan (PPP) for the region. The PPP is MTC's public-facing guide that explains how Bay Area residents and partners can get involved in MTC decision-making, including where to find information, how to provide input and what participation opportunities exist. A draft PPP will be released in early June and will be available on the MTC website at mtc.ca.gov/about-mtc/public-participation/public-participation-plan.

Federal and State Requirements:

The plan is required by federal and state law — specifically for major planning and funding efforts like the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Sustainable Communities Strategy

(SCS), and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). MTC-ABAG fulfills the requirements associated with the RTP and SCS by developing Plan Bay Area, the comprehensive regional plan connecting transportation, housing, land use and the environment. The TIP is the region's federally required four-year, near-term transportation investment list — it includes the projects and programs the region expects to fund and deliver in the next few years. The PPP documents the procedures MTC uses to provide timely notice, access and opportunities to get involved in the agency's work. The PPP also sets expectations for inclusive, accessible and accountable engagement, including guidance on reducing barriers to public participation.

The PPP exists because both federal and state requirements call on MTC to clearly document public participation procedures for Plan Bay Area and the TIP. Historically, the PPP focused on these two policy documents. While this made sense decades ago, MTC's work now encompasses much more than Plan Bay Area and the TIP. As such, staff did a major overhaul of the PPP in 2023 to capture MTC's extensive portfolio of work, transforming it from a document that outlines procedures for engagement strictly for those two work products into a user-friendly guide that explains how Bay Area residents and partners can learn about MTC's work, track decisions and provide input in accessible ways.

Background on the 2023 Public Participation Plan:

With the PPP overhaul in 2023, staff reorganized the PPP to make it more user-friendly by moving the federal and state requirements into appendices and keeping the essential information for how to get involved in the core document. Staff also revised and expanded the Guiding Principles for Engagement, as well as the agency's Engagement Framework. The Guiding Principles serve as MTC's vision for engagement. In summary, MTC's Guiding Principles set an expectation that engagement efforts should:

- have a clear purpose
- support two-way education and relationship building
- be tailored to the project and audience
- communicate clearly in plain language
- demonstrate accountability through reporting back
- remain open and transparent

The Engagement Framework serves as a consistent guide for *how* staff design and conduct public engagement across the agency's various plans, projects, programs and decisions, and it includes: engage early and often; enable access for all; prioritize co-creation and plain language; respond and report back; and assess impact. These Guiding Principles remain largely intact in the 2026 version.

Draft 2026 Public Participation Plan:

The latest iteration of the PPP will incorporate MTC-ABAG's recently adopted [Mission, Vision and Values](#) by framing participation as essential to MTC-ABAG's mission to advance shared regional priorities for transportation, housing and the environment, and its vision to support a Bay Area that is connected, equitable and sustainable. The adopted values are collaboration, equity, excellence, innovation and integrity. In terms of values, **collaboration** is reflected in the PPP's emphasis on shared decision-making and relationship-based work with communities and partner institutions. **Equity** is embedded as both a goal (who should be included) and method (how barriers are removed), anchored by MTC-ABAG's Equity Platform. **Excellence** is reflected in the PPP's focus on quality, consistency and continuous improvement — using structured processes, clear standards and evaluation. **Innovation** is reflected in the PPP's embrace of multiple formats, modern engagement channels, and tools that expand access beyond traditional public meetings. Finally, **integrity** appears through commitment to transparency, accountability, responsiveness and open access to decision-making.

The draft 2026 PPP will include as a third appendix the public participation plan for the next Plan Bay Area update, Plan Bay Area 2060, as required by state law. The Council heard an overview of Plan Bay Area at its April 3, 2026 meeting. This appendix is intended to serve as the plan-specific participation roadmap for Plan Bay Area 2060 by laying out the major milestones and decision points where public input is needed, describing the participation methods that will be used (such as meetings, workshops, online tools, public comment opportunities, etc.), and outlining how comments will be documented and reported back to the public as the plan is developed and considered for adoption.

MTC’s Public Participation Program — From Policy to Practice:

MTC’s public engagement program is guided by the PPP — it is the ongoing set of policies, practices and tools designed to support transparent decision-making informed by meaningful public consultation and community engagement. For staff and the Commission, public participation is not limited to a single meeting or one formal comment period. The program is intended to 1) share information early, 2) provide multiple ways to participate, and 3) communicate back what was heard and how input was considered in staff recommendations and decisions across the agency’s work.

In addition, MTC’s commitment to reducing barriers to participation and prioritizing historically underserved populations that have been excluded from decision-making, including communities of color, people with low incomes, people with disabilities, older adults, youth and people who speak languages other than English, among others, also shape the agency’s public participation program. MTC’s engagement work also aligns with MTC-ABAG’s [Equity Platform](#) (MTC Resolution No. 4559 adopted in 2023), which provides an agency-wide framework for centering communities most impacted by historic disinvestment and structural barriers. In practical terms, this means additional attention and resources are directed to engagement that is accessible, culturally responsive and workable for people with different needs and constraints. For example, MTC’s partnerships with CBOs, including through initiatives like the CARE Program, help extend the agency’s reach into communities that may not otherwise participate in traditional engagement processes, ensuring that outreach and engagement are culturally responsive, trusted and grounded in local relationships.

Outreach, Participation and Engagement:

MTC uses the terms outreach, participation and engagement to describe three related — but different — ways of working with the public and partners. These approaches are not interchangeable. Each one fits a different purpose, timeline and decision-making process, and each appears throughout the Public Participation Plan’s Guiding Principles and Engagement Framework.

Outreach is primarily information sharing. It focuses on awareness and access — helping people understand what is happening, why it matters and how to follow along. Outreach is most appropriate at the start of a process to make sure residents, partners and other stakeholders know what is happening, why it matters, and how to stay informed or get involved.

Participation is inviting and receiving input within a defined process or decision point. It includes public comments, hearings and surveys — methods designed to gather feedback that can be documented, summarized and shared with decision-makers, along with reporting back on what was heard. Participation is most appropriate when a draft proposal or recommendation is ready for public review or when formal comment opportunities are required.

Engagement is two-way learning and relationship-building. It goes beyond collecting comments by creating space for dialogue — questions, discussion and (when appropriate) co-creating solutions with affected communities. Engagement is most appropriate when issues are complex, when tradeoffs need to be understood, or when receiving meaningful input depends on removing barriers through tailored formats and trusted partners.

These definitions help clarify how MTC’s public-facing work is carried out in practice and supports consistent implementation of the PPP. By distinguishing between information-sharing (outreach), structured opportunities to provide input (participation), and two-way dialogue and relationship building (engagement), the definitions help align methods to purpose and ensure that the PPP’s Guiding Principles for Engagement and Engagement Framework can be applied across different communities, timelines and decision points. This framing also helps set clear public expectations about what participation opportunities look like at various stages of a given process and across the portfolio of MTC work and how input will be captured and reported back.

The Council’s Role in Engagement:

The Council is a key “bridge” between community perspectives and regional policy. Councilmembers help flag where policies may create barriers — or overlook lived experience; test whether materials and questions make sense to non-experts; and whether policies reflect community priorities. Importantly, the Council helps strengthen accountability by asking what we heard, who participated, and what changed because of the feedback we received.

This role complements MTC’s partnerships with CBOs by helping ensure that insights gathered through community-based engagement efforts are reflected in regional decision-making and aligned with broader public participation goals. Additionally, Council meetings themselves are an additional public participation forum for residents who attend and/or follow the Council’s work.

Next Steps:

Staff will release the draft Public Participation Plan for review and comment in early June. During the 45-day comment period, MTC staff also will conduct engagement to identify innovative methods for engaging the public and our partners, identify current best practices and assess the relevance and usefulness of the Guiding Principles for Engagement and the Engagement Framework. As part of this engagement, staff recently reached out to Councilmembers to participate in one of three upcoming small group discussions to provide input on MTC’s engagement program and the draft PPP.

The following table outlines key dates leading up to adoption of the 2026 PPP.

Date	Milestone
Early June	Release MTC’s Draft 2026 PPP for 45-day comment period
June 5	Draft 2026 PPP presentation to the MTC ABAG Community Advisory Council
June 12	Draft 2026 PPP presentation to the Joint MTC ABAG Legislation Committee
September 4	Presentation of recommended changes and input received to the MTC ABAG Community Advisory Council

September 11	Presentation of recommended changes and input received to the Joint MTC ABAG Legislation Committee (if there are significant changes, the PPP will be released for a second comment period). If there are no significant changes, referral by the MTC Legislation Committee to Commission for final action.
September 23	Final Commission action on 2026 PPP (or subsequently if a second comment period is needed)

Questions for the Council:

- Do the Guiding Principles for Engagement reflect what meaningful engagement across the Bay Area's diverse communities should look like to be effective?
- Does the Engagement Framework omit any key step necessary for diverse and meaningful community engagement?
- Does the Engagement Framework reflect the practical realities of conducting engagement across the Bay Area?

Attachments:

- Presentation

Reviewed:



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