TRANSIT CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT PLAN

TRANSIT CORRIDOR
ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

WATSONVILLE/PAJARO
to
SANTA CRUZ

SCCRTC

SANTA CRUZ METRO

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INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATIONS & STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT PLAN

PROJECT BACKGROUND

There are three parallel routes that link the communities along the Santa Cruz County Coast from Davenport through Watsonville:

- Highway 1
- Soquel Avenue/Soquel Drive/Freedom Boulevard
- The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line

Highway 1 and Soquel/Freedom are heavily traveled, often congested, and emphasize automobile travel. The 2012 acquisition of the rail right-of-way provides a parallel transportation facility along this corridor that has unused capacity. The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) conducted a Unified Corridor Investment Study (UCS) that was completed in 2019. One of the outcomes of the study is to protect the rail right-of-way for high-capacity public transit use adjacent to a bicycle and pedestrian trail.

In November 2019, RTC in partnership with METRO, began work to identify high-capacity transit options along the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line (SCBRL) through a performance-based planning alternatives analysis process. The analysis will evaluate public transit investment options for a future integrated transit network connecting Santa Cruz in the north to Watsonville and future transit links at Pajaro Station for an alternative mode of travel. The Alternatives Analysis will identify use of all or part of the rail right-of-way, between Pajaro Station and Shaffer Road, as a dedicated transit facility, adjacent to the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) that is being developed. During the analysis, transit alternatives will be compared to define a viable project that will provide the greatest benefit to Santa Cruz County residents, businesses and traveling visitors.

This Communications and Stakeholder Involvement Plan (Plan) identifies the proposed target audiences, outreach objectives, strategies and tactics to be implemented as an integrated part of the Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis in an effort to build awareness, educate, engage and seek informed input that will help guide the identification of a high-capacity transit service between Santa Cruz and Watsonville. The Plan is intended to act as a roadmap for communication and outreach activities through the duration of the project.

Santa Cruz County

Legend:
- Parks
- City Limits
- Urban Areas
- Schools

Santa Cruz Branch Line
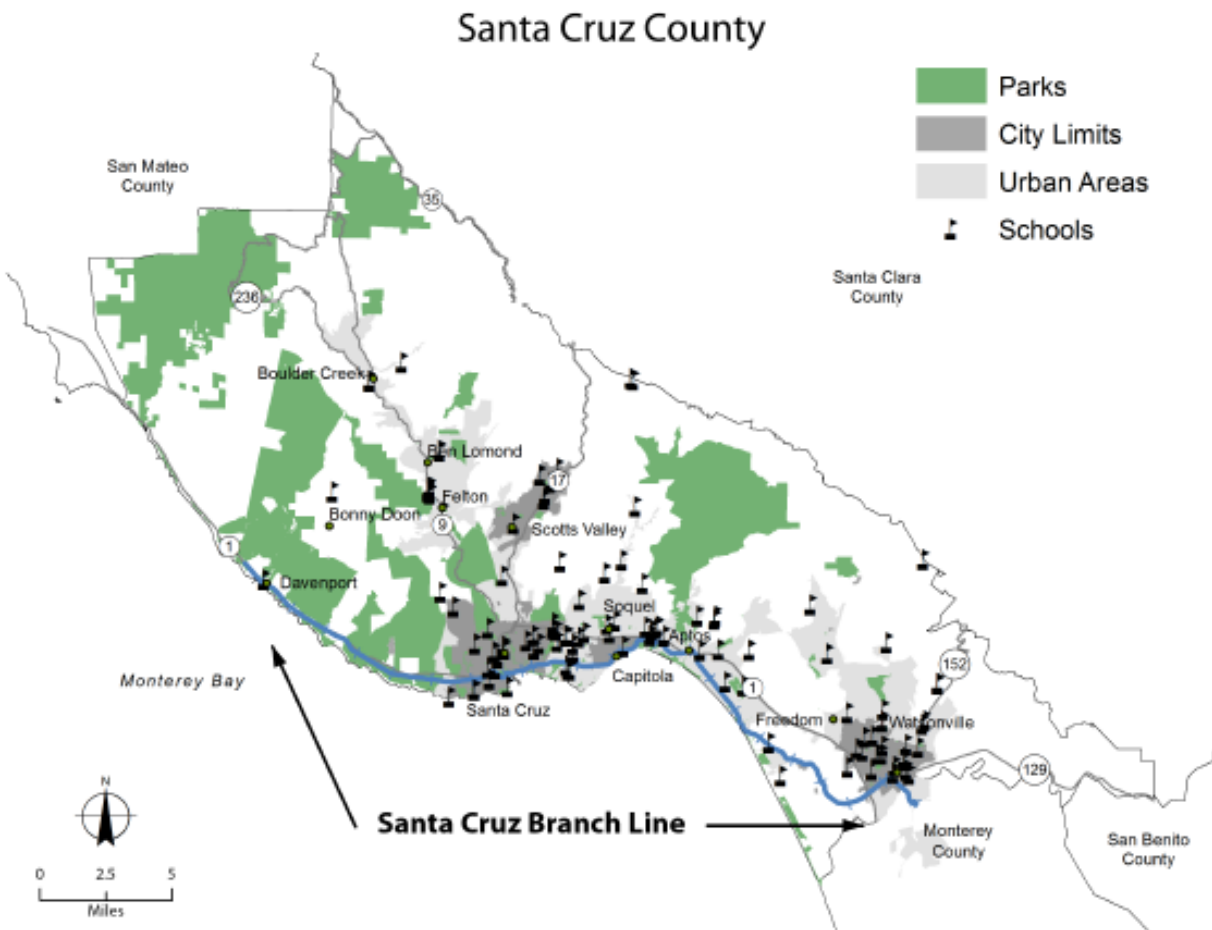
COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH

Technology and culture have drastically changed the way people seek information and communicate. Introduction of personal smart devices and generational shifts in focus towards social media results in the need for use of both traditional high-touch means for communication blended with digital engagement to reach all desired audiences within a medium that they prefer. With individual mobile devices in most households (including low income, diverse communities), easy access to information and a desire to "share" everything, the public requires transparency and a voice. That's why translating information into meaningful dialogue with all members of the public is more critical than ever.

Therefore, it is critical to develop a strategic communications program that is a seamless extension of the technical work and offers the public clear and concise opportunities to participate. The project communication tools and tactics created must address the diversity of stakeholders, and their needs, as well as combine traditional media with newer technologies to ensure a broad reach. Public education, engagement and communications will be a critical component of the overall project planning process and will remain a focal point moving forward throughout each project phase.
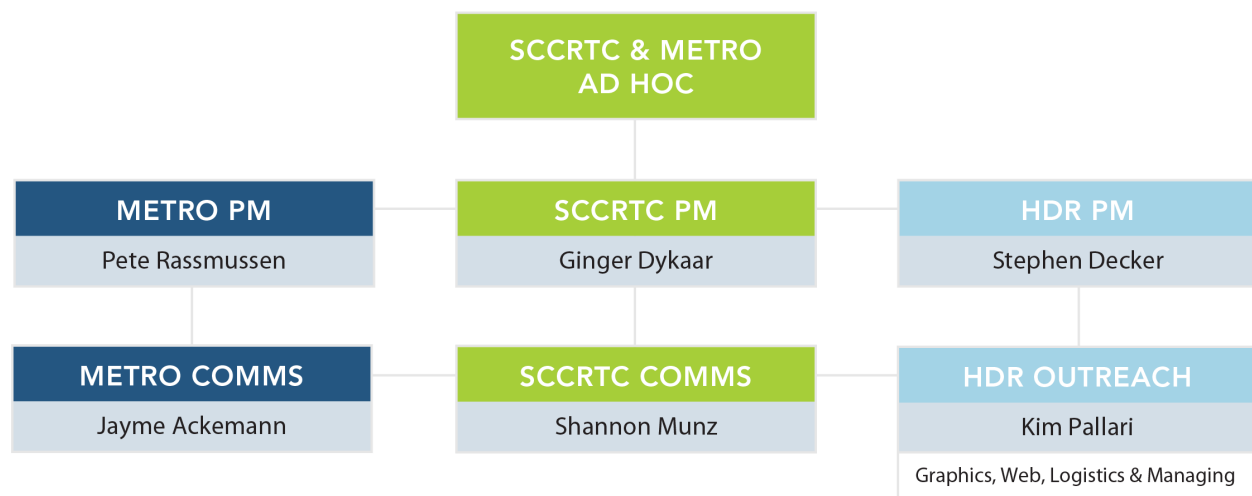
The overarching Plan aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Maintain an open and transparent planning process
- Provide regular, consistent, accurate and timely communication
- Inform and educate
- Build and maintain relationships
- Foster understanding and awareness
- Promptly address concerns as they arise
- Seek informed input

INTERNAL PROJECT TEAM COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL

Internal communications and collaboration will be critical to the project's success. The project team responsible for developing the Alternatives Analysis consists of RTC, METRO and HDR. Regular coordination, collaboration and ongoing communications will ensure the project team works effectively and stays on schedule. To drive the stakeholder outreach program, representatives from RTC, METRO and HDR will provide review and direction on all project key messaging, outreach activities and materials directed to the stakeholders.

The communications organization chart below identifies the key players that will not only lead development of the outreach program, but will also be responsible for providing the stakeholder and public input received to the larger project team.

SCCRTC & METRO AD HOC		
METRO PM	**SCCRTC PM**	**HDR PM**
Pete Rassmussen	Ginger Dykaar	Stephen Decker
METRO COMMS	**SCCRTC COMMS**	**HDR OUTREACH**
Jayme Ackemann	Shannon Munz	Kim Pallari
		Graphics, Web, Logistics & Managing

The Plan is organized to identify the following components:

1. IDENTIFICATION OF TARGET AUDIENCES

Engagement of diverse audiences during the Alternatives Analysis phase is critical in determining an alternative that will meet the needs and be supported by the communities that the future transit system will serve. To engage audiences effectively we must understand who they are and how best to reach them. For the Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis, a tactical stakeholder engagement approach will allow the project team to proactively keep identified audiences informed, address concerns in a timely manner and minimize surprises while maximizing project awareness and understanding. Identified stakeholders will be proactively engaged via presentations at established and project-specific hosted meetings, regional media, and social media campaigns or other digital engagement.

The targeted groups will be requested to partner with SCCRTC and METRO to share project information to their peers, colleagues and neighbors, while also bringing valuable and informed input from their constituents for consideration from the project team.

AGENCY PARTNERS: Ensures key partner agencies are in the loop, updated and prepared throughout all project stages for potential public inquiries.

- RTC/METRO Alternatives Analysis Ad Hoc Committee
- Partner Agencies – Planning and Public Works Departments
- RTC Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC)
- RTC Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee (E&DTAC)
- RTC Interagency Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC)

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS: Allows RTC and METRO to proactively reach into the many facets of a community through targeted focus groups of key representatives.

Community Focus Group 1 – Provides opportunity to proactively connect with non-English speaking and transportation-disadvantaged populations to share information, listen and respond. The project team will connect with key representatives from organizations within the non-English speaking and transportation-disadvantaged communities to ensure these community members receive information on the project and have the opportunity to provide feedback. Representatives may include:

- Spanish Speaking Advocacy
- Faith Based Organizations
- Human Services Organizations
- Low-Income and Minority Organizations

Community Focus Group 2 – Provides opportunity to bring diverse representatives of the community together to discuss the project and seek information while allowing attendees to understand the larger impacts to each unique group. Representatives may include:

- Business Associations / Chamber of Commerce / Major Employers
- Advocacy Groups (Bike/Pedestrian/Youth/Elderly/Disabled/Environmental)
- Educational and Healthcare Institutions
- Neighborhood Groups

GENERAL PUBLIC: RTC and METRO will engage the general public through multiple communication mediums established specifically for the project.

RTC & METRO BOARDS: Allows the project team to seek input from METRO Board and approval from RTC Board at the three key milestones. After receiving input from stakeholders, including the METRO Board, the project team will consider this input and submit a

recommendation to the RTC Board for approval of every key milestone at a regularly scheduled RTC meeting.

2. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MILESTONES

While regular and ongoing communication will occur throughout the planning effort, there are three key technical milestones shown below that will trigger a proactive reach to each of the identified audiences to ensure we are educating, building awareness and seeking input at the right time in the process. At each technical milestone when it is time to inform and seek valuable input, the project team through the communication program will engage, listen, learn and consider the input received from the identified audiences.

MILESTONE 1: Goals/Screening Criteria/Performance Measures & Initial Alternatives
Purpose: Gather initial input on universe of alternatives, draft screening criteria and performance measures. It is critical to obtain buy-in to the alternatives analysis process so that audiences understand how alternatives are narrowed down.

AUDIENCE	FORMAT
Agency Partners: Ad Hoc Committee RTC Advisory Committees Partner Agencies – Planning and Public Works	• Presentations at scheduled meetings
Stakeholder Groups: Community Focus Group 1 Community Focus Group 2	• Project hosted Community focus group meetings
General Public:	• Project hosted open houses • Online outreach (social media, email, website) • Other outlets (newspaper/bus/radio ads, flyers, fact sheet)
RTC & METRO: Commission and Board	• METRO Board meetings to receive input • RTC meetings to obtain approval

MILESTONE 2: Screened Alternatives

Purpose: Share alternative screening process results and highlight narrowed down alternatives. Gather input on short list of alternatives to be considered.

AUDIENCE	FORMAT
Agency Partners: Ad Hoc Committee RTC Advisory Committees Partner Agencies – Planning and Public Works	• Presentations at scheduled meetings
Stakeholder Groups: Community Focus Group 1 Community Focus Group 2	• Online outreach (social media, email, website)
General Public:	• Public Hearing at RTC meeting • Online outreach (social media, email, website) • Other outlets (newspaper/bus/radio ads, flyers, fact sheets)
RTC & METRO: Commission and Board	• METRO Board meetings to receive input • RTC meetings to obtain approval

MILESTONE 3: Preferred Analysis Results & Locally Preferred Alternative

Purpose: Highlight analysis process on short list of alternatives, share performance measure results and seek input on locally preferred alternative.

AUDIENCE	FORMAT
Agency Partners: Ad Hoc Committee RTC Advisory Committees Partner Agencies – Planning and Public Works	• Presentations at scheduled meetings
Stakeholder Groups: Community Focus Group 1 Community Focus Group 2	• Online outreach (email)
General Public:	• Project hosted open houses • Online outreach (social media, email, website) • Other outlets (newspaper/bus/radio ads, flyers, fact sheets)
RTC & METRO: Commission and Board	• METRO Board meetings to receive input • RTC meetings to obtain approval

3. DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT BRAND

In order to maintain a consistent look and feel that will be recognizable and directly tied to Santa Cruz RTC and METRO, a project-specific brand will be developed that may include name, slogan and logo. HDR will work closely with the project team to develop brand options that can be narrowed down to an approved brand. Initial concepts will be provided for review and consideration. Once established, the new project brand will be carried on the project website and throughout all materials. The brand must catch the diverse audience attention in order to garner notice as well as memory and recognition.

4. CREATION OF TOOLS AND IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS

Communication tools and tactics will be designed to capture the broadest audience combining a wide range of traditional mediums such as public workshops, focus group meetings, collateral materials and media relations with digital engagement tools such as a website, social media, email communication, and more. The goal will be to provide convenient and meaningful opportunities for interaction and sharing of information.

Project Contact Database
Central to the Plan is identification and maintenance of a database that contains a diverse group of regional and local stakeholders, organizations, project partners and property owners who may be interested, impacted and influential.

The combined contacts will not only receive information about the project, but also will be asked to disseminate valuable and correct information. The project contacts will continue to be communicated with through a variety of tools such as in-person discussions, presentations, distribution of media alerts or electronic information blasts as well as other project related materials. As the word spreads about the project, it is anticipated that the list of stakeholders may continue to expand.

Project-Specific Website
As communication technologies continue to improve, flexibility and innovation are critical in engaging hard to reach audiences directly. A user-friendly project webpage will play a vital role in the project's communication program. The team will prepare materials to post on the RTC website and establish a protocol for review, maintenance and postings. Interested individuals will be able to sign-up to receive project-related electronic notifications to stay informed.

The project-specific website will be housed on RTC's website (www.sccrtc.org) and a short URL will be established by RTC for easy recognition. Specific information that will be housed on the project website includes:

- Project Overview
- Project Schedule & Key Milestones
- Project Map
- Project News and Events
- Contact Information
- Online Comment Form

Informational Toolkit
Collateral materials will be critical tools in educating the public about the project and keeping them updated through each key project milestone. Materials will include approved key messages to ensure a consistent and effective communications is delivered. Materials will be distributed in hard copy and electronically via e-blasts, the project website and social media. In addition, as determined necessary, materials will be translated into Spanish in order to reach the diverse population, and ensure an open, transparent communications process.

Collateral informational materials may include:

- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
- Project Fact Sheet
- E-newsletter
- PowerPoint presentations

- Display boards
- Comment cards & sign-in sheets
- Static maps

Public Open Houses
At two key points in the Alternatives Analysis process, RTC and METRO will host informational Public Open Houses to create an opportunity for the public to review information and talk one-on-one with key staff members. The open houses will provide information via collateral material handouts and information stations that will include display boards and staff to address questions. Attendees will have the opportunity to provide input in multiple ways at the open houses as they view information at their own pace.

- **Public Open House 1 (Early 2020)** – Project kick-off to gather initial input, learn about the planning process, meet the team and provide feedback on goals, universe of alternatives and screening criteria. A public open house will be held in Watsonville and in Live Oak/Santa Cruz.
- **Public Open House 2 (Mid 2020)** – As alternatives are narrowed down through the screening process, the public will be asked again to provide feedback on the analysis that will identify a locally preferred alternative. A public open house will be held in Watsonville and in Live Oak/Santa Cruz.

RTC Public Meetings
RTC holds regular monthly meetings, which are typically the first Thursday of the month. The schedule and location can be found on the RTC website (www.sccrtc.org). At the beginning of every meeting there is time allocated for "Oral Communications" when the public can speak about any topic that is not on the agenda. If there is an item on the agenda related to the Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis then members of the public will also be able to speak about the project at that time.

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Media Relations

Even as the world of communications continues to move towards a paperless environment, the print and broadcast media continue to be vitally useful and credible outlets for dissemination of information. Whether local and regional media utilize electronic formats and/or hard copy newspapers, creating the opportunity for a special article or announcement within community and minority papers is an important communications tool.

In order to promote key project elements as well as manage the correct and consistent flow of information to the general public during each Alternatives Analysis phase, the project team will develop and disseminate media releases as needed to communicate project information. All media information will be posted on the website and emailed to key stakeholder groups for further dissemination.

Social Media

Social media networks provide another opportunity to effectively push and pull information directly to or from a larger cross-section audience to engage the local communities and decision makers in an open dialogue in real time. A social media strategy will be developed to display project key milestones, updates, and all in-person and online public workshops. Social media will drive the timely reach of various audiences to not only educate about the project, but also promote public involvement opportunities in an interesting, visual way in order to capture attention.

Additionally, RTC and METRO will partner with local and regional agencies and municipalities to leverage resources and maximize outreach. The project team will work closely with RTC and METRO's Communications staff to develop approved content for distribution through agency established social media channels.

5. SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER INPUT REPORT

A summary of stakeholder input at each of the three key milestones will capture the communications and stakeholder outreach efforts, activities, materials and input received. This information will be provided on the Alternatives Analysis website.