

Memorandum

DATE: June 5, 2024
TO: Victoria MPO
CC:
FROM: ATG|DCCM
RE: Stakeholder Engagement Summary

Introduction

As part of the ongoing public engagement essential to the development of the Victoria MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), MPO staff and the ATG team conducted stakeholder interviews to facilitate the identification of opportunities and challenges in the city and county of Victoria. Some reoccurring topics of discussion included the current state and potential of transit, possible traffic signal and intersection improvements, active transportation infrastructure, and economic development, among others. This memorandum contains a summary of the feedback provided by the stakeholders identified below.

Stakeholders

MPO staff and the ATG project team worked collaboratively to identify stakeholders throughout the study area, including the City of Victoria and surrounding communities within Victoria County, who represent local communities, relevant industries, and public services, including:

- Public transportation agencies and their patrons
- Public ports
- Airports
- Freight shippers and providers of freight transportation services
- Private transportation providers
- Users of pedestrian and cycling facilities
- Public service and law enforcement
- People with disabilities
- Affordable housing
- Other interested parties as applicable.

Considering their local knowledge, stakeholders were contacted and informed of the ongoing MTP update process. They were invited to be interviewed one-on-one or to attend a series of

workshops. Some of these stakeholders form part of the Temporary Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC), which also convened for a meeting in which ATG staff presented the findings of MTP analyses and gathered feedback. Table 1 lists the stakeholders who were interviewed or attended workshops and their affiliations.

Table 1: Participating stakeholders

| Name | Agency | Acronyms |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Andrew Deras* | Victoria Transit | UHV- University of Houston- Victoria VEDC- Victoria Economic Development Corporation VSTDC- Victoria Sales Tax Development Corporation |
| Ashlie Thomas* | Business Owner | |
| Bernard Leger | CEO DeTar Hospital VEDC | |
| Bobby Cubriel | Victoria College | |
| Brenda Tally | Victoria Tourism Advisory Board Ballet Academy of South TX | |
| Brian P. Keith | Victoria Tourism Advisory Board Performance Food/ Freight | |
| Danielle Williams | Director of Economic Development, City of Victoria | |
| David Brown | City of Victoria Planning Commission | |
| Diego Gonzalez | Caterpillar Procurement VEDC | |
| Duane Crocker | Mayor, City of Victoria VSTDC VEDC | |
| Jan Scott | Councilmember Dt. 4, City of Victoria Victoria MPO Chair Lawyer | |
| Jason Ohrt | Victoria County Commissioner Pct. 2 Victoria MPO | |
| Jeff Vinklarek* | TxDOT Yoakum District | |
| Jennifer Ortiz Garza | UHV Victoria Tourism Advisory Board | |
| Jesús A. Garza | City Manager, City of Victoria Victoria MPO VEDC | |
| Jon Paul (JP) Hull | VSTDC Business Owner | |
| Jonas Titus* | President of VEDC | |
| JP Strickland | VEDC UHV | |
| JR Amaya* | Prosperity Bank | |
| Katrine Villela* | Assistant Director of the Victoria Public Library | |
| Ken Gill* | Director of Public Works, City of Victoria Victoria MPO | |
| Kenneth Sexton | Victoria County Commissioner (Precinct 4) | |
| Lee Keeling | Former Victoria Parks & Recreation Commissioner Lawyer | |
| Lenny Llerena | Executive Director, Victoria Regional Airport Victoria MPO | |
| Mark Loffgren | Councilmember Super Dt 6, City of Victoria Victoria MPO | |
| Mike Etienne* | Assistant City Manager, City of Victoria | |
| Nancy Garner | VEDC Woolson Real Estate Co. | |

| Name | Agency | Acronyms |
|------------------|---|---|
| Raquel Garza | Chairwoman, Victoria Housing Authority Board | VSTDC- Victoria Sales Tax Development Corporation |
| Russell Dempsey | VSTDC Business Owner | |
| Sherry McShaffry | VSTDC Regional Steel | |
| Tammy Emerson | Executive Director, Housing Authority of Victoria | |

*Stakeholders who were not interviewed one-on-one but attended a TTAC meeting or workshop meeting.

Additionally, the project team presented to the VEDC Tuesday Morning Regional Partnership meeting to get their feedback and input on needs and vision for the future of mobility in Victoria County. Further outreach was conducted at the downtown library with an open-door workshop for community stakeholders. The additional outreach events helped garner group feedback and provided clarity to the project team on priorities expressed by participants.

Key Takeaways

Goal Prioritization

As part of their interviews, stakeholders were asked to participate in a goal prioritization exercise in order for project staff to gain a more meaningful understanding of the community's values. The participants were given a self-determined number of stickers (meaning that they had the option of emphasizing as many or as few goal areas as they saw fit) and were tasked with marking those goals that they considered to be the most important for the Victoria community. Table 2 details the results of this activity, where the highest priority goal was 'Improve Public Safety' with a total of 21 stickers, followed by 'Safety and Security,' and 'Economic Development' with 20 stickers each.

Table 2: Goal Prioritization Results

| Goal | Number of Stickers Received |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Improve Public Transit | 21 |
| Safety & Security | 20 |
| Economic Development | 20 |
| Reduce Congestion | 19 |
| Walking & Cycling | 15 |
| Preserve & Maintain | 10 |
| Support Land Use Goals | 7 |
| Environment & Resilience | 3 |
| Equitable Investments | 3 |

Participants were also presented with the new, revised vision statement for the project along with the vision statement from the 2045 MTP and asked to give their opinion on which should be used as the vision for the 2050 MTP update. The new vision statement was more popular:

The multimodal transportation system in Victoria will be safe, well connected, and sustainable in order to reliably move people and goods in support of regional equity, economic development, and quality of life.

Reoccurring Topics of Discussion

The Roadway System

Stakeholders frequently brought up challenges and concerns related to the roadway system and offered their comments on a variety of topics.

Traffic Signals

One frequent topic of conversation was the city's traffic signals. The most common comment made by stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds was the need for coordinated signal timing. Roadways identified as having especially problematic signal timing included:

- Navarro Street
- Intersection of John Stockbauer and Airline Road
- Signals in the area surrounding UHV campus
- Southeastern Victoria County

Stakeholders also identified intersections the addition of traffic signals or traffic signal features might create benefit:

- Intersection of Ben Wilson Street and Airline Road (left turn signal on Airline eastbound)
- Intersection of Loop 463 and Airline Road (signalization; left turn signal)
- Intersection of Broadmoor Street and Navarro (traffic signal)
- Intersection of FM 236 and FM 237 (traffic signal)
- Wayne Watkins Drive and Lone Tree Road (traffic signal)

Congestion

Stakeholders called attention to traffic congestion on various roadways and areas within the study area. Navarro Street was brought up more than once. Specifically, congestion is especially heavy on the northern part of the roadway, near the mall, and that development in the area could result in congestion intensifying with time. One stakeholder noted Placido Benavides Drive had been successful in alleviating some congestion on Navarro Street with the connection to Salem Drive, creating an alternate route to the commercial area in the north of Victoria.

Another area with reported congestion is the northeast area of the city. Comments detailed new projects contributing to this area being one of rapid growth within the city, as well as the consideration that Victoria East High school along with other local schools were factors contributing to increased traffic in the area. Attention was also called to the University of Houston at Victoria (UHV) and Victoria College (VC) area, where congestion problems were reported on Ben Jordan Street and Airline Road. One stakeholder expressed frustration at the mitigation efforts generally being limited to additional lanes or wider roads, stating that in his opinion, this would not effectively solve the issue of congestion, and exacerbated safety issues on Victoria roadways.

Safety Concerns

Many stakeholders expressed concerns about safety within Victoria's transportation system, with comments mentioning things like pedestrian safety and high speeds on roadways. The most common comment was the need for highway maintenance to reduce risks, including clearing debris from roadways in a timely manner. Stakeholders also called for general improvements to intersections on main thoroughfares and more concentrated planning efforts near the community's schools to reduce accidents. Various comments were made regarding the condition of specified roadways and intersections, the most common of which being the "Five Points" intersection at the junction of US-59T Business/W. Rio Grande Street, W. North Street, and N. Moody Street. The intersection was identified as dangerous due to its unusual configuration, where five streets converge, regulated by an all-way stop sign. Stakeholders called for a reexamination of the intersection to develop a safer traffic flow and expressed concern at the lack of pedestrian infrastructure at the crossings.

Other potential roadway safety issues included:

- Flooding on Airline Drive
- Flooding near the Caterpillar/northeast Victoria industrial area
- Flooding near FM 444 & Ocelot Drive near the community of Inez
- High speeds and volumes with no traffic signal at the intersection of Loop 463 and Airline Road
- Intersection of Ben Wilson and US-59T Business generally hazardous
- Intersection of FM 236 and FM 447 generally hazardous
- US-59T Business identified as hazardous for pedestrians
- Pedestrian crossing infrastructure needed on US- 59T Business/ Houston Highway
- Pedestrian crossing infrastructure needed along Zac Lentz Parkway

Some stakeholders also called attention to a lack of sidewalk connectivity as an issue of safety, stating that it created a hazardous environment for all roadway users, especially more vulnerable populations such as the local unhoused community. Other safety concerns included

a call for more police presence on Navarro Street, since many roadway users speed there, as well as addressing more generally aggressive driver behavior and culture. Stakeholders brought up the culture of speeding in the downtown area as a safety concern and suggested narrowing lanes to discourage high speed potentially through the installation of bicycle lanes. Some stakeholders also raised concerns regarding emergency evacuation situations for students and other residents that lack access to transportation.

Roadway System Improvements

Stakeholders offered comments detailing their personal visions of what an optimized roadway system in Victoria would look like. Most of these comments pertained to specific roadways and intersections:

- Navarro Street:
 - Needs general maintenance
 - Long turnaround/U-turn time at TX 463 intersection
- Lone Tree Road:
 - Needs improved traffic pattern near Caterpillar plant
- FM 236:
 - Needs widening out to Mission Valley (widening project programmed in FY 23-26 & FY 25-28 Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP))
 - Needs safety features near elementary school
- Glasgow Street/Placido Benavides Drive:
 - Needs widening and augmented speed limit to achieve long-term goal of diverting traffic away from Navarro Street
- US- 59T Business/ Houston Highway:
 - Needs expansion and general improvements
- Burroughsville Road:
 - Needs general improvements

Stakeholders commented on desired future improvement efforts that they would like to see including:

- Connecting US-77/Zac Lentz Pkwy west of Victoria to 87 near Victoria West High School
- Connecting Airline Blvd to the Victoria Regional Airport
- Creating a roadway that bypasses Bloomington, south of Victoria
- Connecting Guy Grant Road to Ben Jordan Street

- Progress toward bringing I-69 development project to Victoria
- Easier through access to Victoria for freight movement
- More turn-only lanes throughout town

Development

Downtown

Various stakeholders praised the recent economic investments in the downtown Victoria area. Some mentioned supporting the establishment of small businesses that contribute to the economic vitality of the city and attract tourism. One stakeholder praised the recent developments but commented that they felt a need for a cohesive character or brand to be established for the downtown area to guide development. Another stakeholder brought up the “illusion of parking scarcity,” while another suggested the addition of more on-street parking.

Airport

The Victoria Regional Airport was another frequent topic of conversation in the stakeholder interviews. The airport was generally viewed as an integral amenity to the community and good for economic development. Stakeholders noted that the airport is growing in use, affordable, user friendly due to its small size, and especially good for doing business in Houston and other nearby cities. The most common concern regarding the airport raised by interviewees was a lack of access and connectivity. Stakeholders commented no bus route exists allowing citizens to reach the area, limiting multimodal access to air travel, and that access to the airport from the south of the city was limited as well. Others mentioned that flight availability and amenities in the airport were limited and had potential for development. In addition, a lack of hotels and a convention center near the airport were also mentioned. Some interviewees noted the potential for freight movement via the airport and the Port of Victoria, given the strategic location of Victoria between Houston and Austin. These stakeholders suggested exploring funding avenues to accommodate freighter planes. Finally, one interviewee mentioned the potential for firefighting aircraft infrastructure.

Higher Education

Victoria is home to the UHV and VC, both located near North Ben Wilson Street and US-59T Business/ Houston Highway. Stakeholders included representatives of students and faculty from both institutions; however, comments surrounding the colleges and college area were not limited to these stakeholders. One key takeaway was that transportation to classes was identified as one of the biggest issues facing students in Victoria. Interviewees commented that US-59T Business/ Houston Highway as well as other streets in the surrounding area could use multimodal infrastructure to help students’ mobility. One action mentioned being taken to remedy this issue is a new partnership between UHV and Uber, though some have raised concerns about driver scarcity due to the smaller size of the city. Limited parking options and the lack of connectivity to economic opportunity for students were also mentioned as challenges to overcome. Stakeholders highlighted and praised recent improvements on the

roadway infrastructure in the area near the colleges and nearby healthcare facilities as being good for health and a value to the area.

Economic Development

Economic development proved to be one of the most talked-about topics in stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders identified economic drivers in the area, including the oil and gas industry, industrial plants, and cattle ranching. They highlighted the fact that Victoria and neighboring Calhoun Counties are designated Foreign-Trade Zones (FTZs). They also identified high-growth areas in the study area, including the northern end of Navarro Street and the northeast side of Victoria, as well as employment growth in the south of the city and county of Victoria and surrounding communities. One example of such growth is the plan for the construction of a rare earth minerals processing plant in nearby Seadrift in Calhoun County.

Stakeholders brought up the current pattern of development, and fearing sprawl to the north of the city and recommending that as growth occurs, recommended that the city focus on infilling and optimizing connectivity. Interviewees mentioned that as commercial development continues along North Navarro Street, available space there will run out, and suggested looking into buying right of way from property owners to make room for new development. It was also suggested to investigate where the next growth area will be, and to encourage development northeast toward Houston. Stakeholders called attention to a potential regional growth catalyst: the Matagorda Ship Channel Improvement Project. Although the project is in its early stages, interviewees with local freight knowledge predicted that when finished, it will bring about significant increases in economic activity to the region, and consequently, increased volumes of freight traffic to Victoria, which will require support. Stakeholders called attention to Victoria being a center of culture for the surrounding region and recognized the opportunity to generate revenue due to this circumstance.

Another issue stakeholders highlighted was the cumbersome nature of freight movement through the city, citing the lack of an interstate, meaning that freight must pass through the city or take a significant detour around it when traveling in Victoria.

Regarding the future of Victoria's economic vitality, stakeholders suggested the city encourage establishment of small businesses and take full advantage of the surrounding water amenities such as the Guadalupe River, especially considering the city's hot climate. They recommended that the city integrate these amenities into its character, and referenced local establishments like waterfront restaurant The Pumphouse, and the city of San Antonio as examples. They also suggested the encouragement of recreational activities such as fishing and boating at Coletto Creek.

Quality of Life

Stakeholders were prompted to offer their personal definition of quality of life and any comments or suggestions regarding quality of life in Victoria and how it could be augmented. Interviewees praised the central location between bigger cities like Houston, Austin, and San

Antonio and the city's amenities such as Riverside and Ethel Lee Tracy Parks as well as the downtown revitalization efforts, including the DeLeon Plaza.

Other common stakeholder comments included that Victoria was a very car-dependent city, citing a lack of trails, walking and biking paths and infrastructure, pedestrian-friendly areas, Uber/rideshare services, and that mobility could be improved, especially in the southern area of the city. This would increase connectivity to the downtown area and in turn stimulate the economy and further revitalization efforts.

Alternative Transportation

Transit

Transit was a frequent topic of discussion in many of the interviews conducted. Stakeholders offered both praise and suggestions for potential improvements to local public transportation services. The most frequent comment made related to a need for improving the general accessibility of transit to Victoria residents. Several participants called attention to a need for improved connectivity to various local activity hubs, including to the UHV and VC campuses, medical centers, the local HEB grocery store, the public library, Riverside Park, the Caterpillar manufacturing facility and other places of employment. Those stakeholders who represent local students called for more multimodal connections between the college area and the city's downtown. They also stated that from a student perspective, transit is not a very reliable mode of transportation. They shared accounts from students who rely on alternative transportation who experienced delays and difficulties finding information about buses and routes. Other suggestions made regarding transit included:

- Working with local employers like Caterpillar to create employer-sponsored routes to connect Victoria's workforce to employment opportunities
- Working collaboratively with the local higher education facilities to create a discounted student fare or student voucher program to make transit more accessible to the student population
- More accessible educational resources surrounding local transit services
- Improving multimodal connectivity to affordable housing in the area
- Providing improved bus stop amenities such as shelters
- Providing two-way bus service instead of the current system of all loop routes which results in a minimum round-trip time of one hour to go from origin to destination and back

Stakeholders praised Victoria Transit for providing comprehensive and inclusive service with a relatively low budget. They emphasized the need for optimal transit as an important factor in the measure of quality of life, stressing the collective desire for Victoria to be an attractive place for young people to live, study, and work.

Active Transportation

Various stakeholders commented on the condition of active transportation facilities in Victoria. The most common comment was a call for more active transportation infrastructure, especially in the downtown and southern areas of Victoria. Interviewees cited a lack of multimodal connectivity, safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists, and a potential for enhanced quality of life as reasons for prioritization of active transportation development. Related suggestions included:

- Pedestrian signals along Main Street (pedestrian signal study being considered by MPO)
- Pedestrian signals and crosswalks across town
- Shared-use paths across town
- Bike lanes across town, especially in the downtown area
- Education to foster use and respect for alternative modes of transportation
- Multimodal connectivity to Riverside Park
- Multimodal connectivity in the northern Victoria area
- Mid-road crossings for long blocks on main thoroughfares
- Sidewalk improvements on Navarro Street
- Sidewalk improvements for Victoria residents with disabilities
- Walking and biking connectivity to northeast and central (industrial and commercial) areas

Conclusion

Stakeholder feedback is crucial to providing context to data-driven analyses and helps the technical team develop well-rounded recommendations tailored to the needs and vision of the community. Feedback received is integral in the development and prioritization of investment strategies and prioritization of capital projects. The above input along with public feedback received through surveys will be used to develop weighting factors for criteria used in the project prioritization process. Further, stakeholders will be invited back to review and provide more feedback on project recommendations and the long-range plan overall.