



EC RIDER

**PLANNING YOUR
FUTURE RIDE**



10

**TRANSIT
DEVELOPMENT
PLAN**



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Introductions

Okaloosa County's Emerald Coast (EC) Rider transit has initiated a 10-year Transit Development Plan major update utilizing support from the Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization (TPO).

A Transit Development Plan (TDP) is a Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) required, 10-year horizon plan. The TDP is intended to support the development of an effective multimodal transportation system in Okaloosa County and serves as the basis for defining public transit needs, which is a prerequisite to receive state funds.

The focus of the TDP will be to identify transit service needs, prioritize improvements and determine the resources required for implementing modified or new service. The central objective of this effort is to improve transit opportunities and offer a robust, multimodal connection experience for the Okaloosa County EC Rider service area. In order to inform and assist with the facilitation of this study, a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) will be implemented and is comprehensively outlined in this document.

Purpose of the Public Involvement Plan (PIP)

The PIP is a strategic guide for the EC Rider public participation approach, in compliance with federal and state regulations. This PIP offers a platform for the public, existing EC Rider passengers, and stakeholders to engage with the planning process and obtain information on the progress and findings generated from the project. Once approved by EC Rider TDP Project Team (Project Team), this PIP will guide the outreach process for the length of the project. Each of the planned initiatives and outreach activities will inform EC Rider customers and the community about the benefits of transit and the new services that will be developed as part of the process.



Partners & Stakeholders

The impact of this project in Okaloosa County will guide the operation and growth of the transit system for the next 10 years. This study recognizes the importance of involving community leaders throughout the planning process. The EC Rider staff and Project Team are committed to engaging stakeholders, existing riders, and the general public; keeping them updated on progress and ensuring they have a voice.

A database of stakeholders will be maintained by the Project Team and include representation from the agencies described in the following sections. To ensure consistency and compliance with local jurisdiction requirements and community preparedness, this project will connect with stakeholders from the following:

County & Cities: Okaloosa County, Walton County, City of Destin, City of Crestview, City of Fort Walton Beach, City of Shalimar, City of Mary Esther, and City of Valparaiso.

Transportation Agencies: FDOT and Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization (TPO).

Community Representatives: Community Redevelopment Agencies, CareerSource Okaloosa-Walton, Economic Development Councils, Tourism Development Councils, Social Service Agencies, Chambers of Commerce's, and area Public Housing Authorities.

Okaloosa County Mobility Plan: Coordination will occur between 10-year Transit Development Plan and the Okaloosa County Mobility Plan.



Objectives & Strategies

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), enacted in 2012, included provisions to make federal surface transportation more streamlined, performance-based, multimodal, and to address challenges facing the U.S. transportation system. This includes improving safety, maintaining infrastructure condition, reducing traffic congestion, improving efficiency of the system, freight movement, protecting the environment, and reducing delays in project delivery. The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act builds on changes made by MAP-21. This Act was signed into law on Dec. 4, 2015 and authorizes \$305 billion over fiscal year (FY) 2016 - 2020 for federal-aid highways, highway and motor vehicle safety, public transportation, motor carrier safety, hazardous materials safety, rail, as well as, research, technology, and statistics programs.

The FAST Act allows states and local governments to move forward with critical transportation projects with confidence that they will have a federal partner long term. It also recognizes that public involvement in transportation planning is critical for a transparent community development process and is established in legal framework throughout jurisdictions. These legislative changes will improve innovation and efficiency in the development of projects from the planning and environmental review process, through project delivery.

In tandem with the above, the PIP was created to provide a quality public outreach process during the TDP process. This plan will ensure the community is offered ample opportunity to engage in the process, participate in project dialogue, and assist with informing leadership of the local perspective related to project elements. In accordance with established PIP standards from the FDOT TDP Handbook (2018) the goals of the EC Rider PIP include:

- Promote greater awareness and understanding of the EC Rider and the TDP process;
- Encourage inclusive and comprehensive public input throughout the TDP planning process;
- Develop the EC Rider TDP around the public feedback received through the process; and
- Enhance the EC Rider public participation process through continued observation and incorporation of new approaches.

Accompanying these goals are specific objectives and activity strategies which, will be completed over the course of the project timeline. These tasks range from presentations to key stakeholders and public meetings, surveys, social media, grassroots community outreach, and electronic engagement.



Stakeholder Engagement & Outreach Techniques

To accomplish the goals of the PIP, specific engagement and outreach strategies will be undertaken which include face-to-face interaction, presentations, ridership surveys, virtual meetings, visual content creation, and strategic digital communications. The following describes these efforts in more detail.

The project team will monitor local and state Covid-19 social distancing guidelines to ensure these guidelines are being followed regarding public engagement techniques.

Objective #1: Public Feedback

The PIP strives to obtain public input from the community, existing riders, and stakeholders on the current EC Rider transit experience through the following means. This objective will be divided into three phases:

- Phase one will focus on understanding current conditions through Origin & Destination Surveys, Customer Satisfaction Surveys, and stakeholder engagement.
- Phase two will focus on creating a better transportation system and developing different scenarios for analysis by meeting with stakeholders, Chambers of Commerce's, and organizations that represent the hospitality industry.
- Phase three will focus on TDP approval and will consist of showing the plan to existing and potential riders.
- Public comments will be encouraged during the entire TDP process.

Several communication methods will be used to garner public input. These methods include existing ridership surveys, one-on-one stakeholder interviews, virtual meetings, and engaging agency partners/civic organizations. Where opportunities exist, the PIP will also seek to piggyback on community events to garner public feedback throughout the process.



Public Engagement Tools

A variety of tools will be utilized to obtain public input. These tools include the following:

A. Public Engagement

i. In person

1. On the bus and/or at the EC Rider transfer points. Engagement to include information about the Planning Your Future Ride purpose and process, survey solicitation, and other open feedback opportunities. A 14 day period will be established for public comments.
2. Public engagement surveys during Phase 1 & 2. Surveys may be completed by one of three methods: online using the EC Rider website, in-person with someone from the Project Team, or by paper when surveys are being administered. Survey responses will be collected for 14 days.
3. Stakeholder engagement will include interviews that follow Florida Statute 14-73 3.
4. Optional Grassroots Public Engagement as they may come up, such as the Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival or other similar events, where the team can educate attendees on the Planning Your Future Ride purpose and process, solicit open feedback, and explain additional opportunities to participate.

ii. Online

Each survey will remain active on the EC Rider website for a minimum of 14 days from any in-person events that administer the survey during Phase 1 and Phase 2.

iii. Social Service Agencies

Identify social service agencies to educate and promote the EC Rider within the community.

B. Promotion

Planning Your Future Ride TDP materials will be developed and distributed to the community.

These materials include:

- Informational flyers
- Newspaper articles/advertisements
- Website



Schedule of Public Outreach Activities

Table 1 provides the outreach schedule including details and tentative dates.

Phase	Target Audience	Activity	Timeframe	Promotion
Phase 1	Existing Riders	Online Surveys	Sept/Nov 2020	EC Rider Website
	Grassroots Public Outreach with United Way Agencies	Participate in existing Social Service Agencies	Sept/Nov 2020	Newspaper, EC Rider Website
	Stakeholders	Interviews	Sept/Nov 2020	Identified by EC Rider staff & Project Team, email, phone call, or in person interviews
Phase 2	Existing Riders	Surveys	Winter 2021	EC Rider Website & In-person interviews
	Outreach to Community Leaders, Hospitality Industry, and General Public	Participate in existing events or meetings	Winter 2021	Newspaper, EC Rider Website
	Stakeholders	Interviews	Winter 2021	Identified by EC Rider staff & Project Team, email, phone call, or in person interviews
Phase 3	Existing Riders	Transfer Point Engagement	Spring 2021	Website, Social media
	Grassroots Public Outreach with Hospitality Industry	Participate in existing events or meetings	Spring 2021	Newspaper, EC Rider Website



Promotion & Outreach

Objective #2: Promotion & Outreach

To create community interest and support for the EC Rider TDP.

Promotional Materials

The TDP will build awareness around the Planning Your Future Ride brand established during the TDP process. The Planning Your Future Ride TDP materials will be developed and distributed to the community. These materials include:

- Informational flyers
- Newspaper articles/advertisements
- Website

These materials will be distributed or displayed on Northwest Florida Daily News, community events, central bus stops, EC Rider website and/or Facebook page, and/or County government buildings. Additionally, presentation materials will be formulated using the brand and made available for all meetings and activities. Handout materials will include a note in Spanish directing them to the EC Rider website where Spanish accessibility will be available.

Survey and Website Information

An online survey will be developed, through which the public can engage and provide feedback. Surveys can be completed by one of three methods: online using the EC Rider's website, in-person with someone from the Project Team, or by paper when surveys are being administered.

Visually, the web page will be designed to maximize public engagement. An interactive call-to-action (i.e. survey completion) will be prominently placed on the EC Rider home page. The survey will capture participant contact information for continued follow-up and education with individuals throughout the project. Each survey will be made available on the EC Rider website for a minimum of 14 days during Phases 1 and 2. The EC Rider website will also include a dedicated space to highlight engagement opportunities.

As the project progresses, key reports and findings will be provided on the EC Rider website for resident review and feedback.

Measures of effectiveness for the website will include:

- Number of visitors to website
- Number of surveys completed via the website



Measures of Effectiveness

Table 2 provides measures of public engagement success.

Public Involvement Objective	Strategy	Activity	Measures	Targets
Objective 1: Public Feedback	Obtain public input from the community, existing riders, and stakeholders	In person: Surveys	Number of in person surveys completed	10 In person surveys completed
		Grassroots Public Outreach	Number of outreach activities	4 Outreach activities, meetings, or events
		Stakeholder Interviews	Interviews	10 Interviews completed
		Online: Surveys	Survey administered and operational	25 Online surveys completed
		Social Media	Facebook postings	10 Comments recorded
Objective 2: Promotion & Outreach	To create community interest and support for the EC Rider TDP	Promotional Materials	Branding TDP	Branding Package
			Distribution of informational flyers	200 Flyers distributed
		Website	Number of Website Updates	12 Website updates



Requirements

The public outreach process for this project will take place in compliance with federal law (§450.316, Code of Federal Regulation), and state law (Rule 14-73 (3)a and Section 286, Florida statutes) which, both require the public involvement process to provide reasonable opportunity for comment from a wide array of diverse groups represented in the community. This approach also aligns with the Okaloosa-Walton TPO Title VI Policy Statement and Public Participation Program guidelines. This includes the Okaloosa-Walton TPO's Title VI Plan which identifies the Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations in its service area and provides guidelines for TPO staff to help ensure that information and services are accessible to LEP persons.

The Project Team is committed to supporting and engaging Okaloosa County citizens within the public involvement process. Diverse public participation is crucial for quality decision-making regarding this project and efforts will be made to reach all members of the community, including traditionally underserved populations, opportunities for contribution to the planning process.

Public input will be assessable and encouraged throughout each phase of the project. Feedback will be incorporated into the development of the study and the final plan will be posted on the project website. Anyone requesting hard copies of the project documentation will be able to do so upon request to EC Rider staff.

Public Record of Meetings

The Sunshine Law requires minutes of local government meetings be recorded at all public meetings. Meetings with boards and commissions will also be open to the public and properly noticed. The Project Team will take minutes of public meetings and distribute them to associated board and committee members as well as post the minutes to the EC Rider website, once approved, and offer hard copies upon request.

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