

Public Participation Plan Capital Area Transit Authority

Final
September 2022

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Purpose

The Purpose of this public participation plan (PPP) is to detail how CATS will deliver information, services, and programs that reflect the community's values and benefit all community areas. CATS recognizes the necessity of involving the public in the planning and implementation of transit services.

CATS' public engagement strategies are designed to provide the public with access to information about the agency's services and provide a variety of efficient and convenient methods for receiving and considering public comments before implementing service changes. CATS also recognizes the importance of many types of stakeholders in the decision-making process. These include other units of government, metropolitan area agencies, community-based organizations, significant employers, passengers, and the general public, including low-income, minority, LEP, and other traditionally underserved communities.

According to FTA Title VI regulatory guidance, the recipients and sub-recipients should therefore seek out and consider the viewpoints of minority and low-income populations and individuals who do not speak English fluently in the course of conducting public outreach and involvement activities. (FTA Circular 4702.1B) Furthermore, the funding recipients and sub-recipients should offer early and continuous opportunities for the public to identify the social, economic, and environmental impacts of proposed transportation decisions.

This effort includes seeking out and considering the viewpoints of minority, low-income, and LEP populations (as well as older adults and people with limited mobility) while conducting public outreach activities, consistent with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Circular 4702.1B.

CATS may modify its public participation methods over time based on the needs of its customers and the general public. Therefore, this plan is a living document that may be updated periodically to reflect community preferences, changing demographics, transit services, and needs identified from new communication and outreach methods.

When planning for public engagement, CATS will incorporate strategies intended to promote the involvement of minority and LEP individuals in public participation activities, as appropriate for the plan, project, or service in question, and consistent with federal Title VI regulations, Executive Order 13166 on Limited English Proficiency, and the U.S. Department of Transportation LEP Guidance.

Principles

The following principles are used to develop the Public Participation Plan for CATS projects and programs:

- CATS will determine what non-English languages and other barriers may exist to public participation within the service area.
- CATS will provide a general notification of meetings, particularly forums for public input, in a manner that is understandable to LEP populations in its service area.
- Public meetings will be held in locations that are accessible to transit riders and people

with disabilities and will be scheduled at times convenient for the members of the general public.

- Public meetings and hearings will be advertised in the community where non- English languages have been identified in the updated LEP Plan. Through printed materials (e.g., interior cards, flyers, and/or comment cards) describing the proposed changes or other critical system information on-board buses, at major transit stops, local print media, and the CATS website.
- CATS will provide notification regarding the availability of language assistance at public meetings as described in the LAP.

Goals

CATS recognizes the importance of involving the public in planning and implementing transportation projects and services. Moreover, the agency believes firmly that consistent communication with riders, businesses, and visitors, alike is key to the success of CATS planning and project development efforts. Therefore, the goals of the CATS PPP are to promote meaningful opportunities for the community, including low-income, minority, and LEP populations, to be involved in the potential impacts of proposed transportation decisions by CATS. To that end, CATS has developed four goals for public participation:

- **Awareness:** Increase awareness of transportation projects in East Baton Rouge Parish and within the transit service area in the capital region.
- **Education and Outreach:** To educate the public, raise awareness, and allow public input in the CATS transportation planning process through social media, printed materials, and other engagement methods.
- **Participation:** To provide ample opportunity for stakeholders and the general public to participate in the planning process and provide feedback on draft documents, policies, and services.
- **Partnerships:** To foster more significant partnerships with local public agencies, social service organizations, and other community groups throughout

CATS' staff will utilize the following considerations developed as part of the efforts to evaluate the racial equity implications of critical decisions:

- Have various ethnic communities/people of color been informed, meaningfully involved, and authentically represented in these processes/decisions?
- How has this been done?
- How has the feedback been considered and incorporated?
- Is there a group that benefits more than another because of this process/decision?
- What could be one unintended consequence of this process/decision for ethnic communities/communities of color?
- What action will be implemented to advance equity in this process/decision?

Methods of Public Engagement

The PPP identifies a menu of available methods for providing information to CATS customers and the general public. While these communication methods are broadcast

widely, they are critical tools in reaching minority and LEP populations. Staff considers several factors when designing the public engagement process, such as the magnitude of the proposed change or decision, what level of influence public opinion has over the decision, and who will be impacted by the decision. Moreover, CATS incorporates strategies intended to promote the involvement of minority and LEP individuals in public participation activities, as appropriate for the plan, project, or service in question, and consistent with FTA Title VI regulations, Executive Order 13166 on Limited English Proficiency, and the U.S. Department of Transportation LEP Guidance. All communication methods are available for translation or interpretation upon request.

CATS communicates relevant information to customers and the general public through the following methods:

- **Public notices** – These are published in the daily newspaper of record, the Advocate, and posted on the CATS website.
- **CATS’ Social Media** – CATS’ Facebook page, Twitter, and Instagram, are monitored and used by staff to interact with riders and can be leveraged to push out information regarding service changes and opportunities for the public to participate in the CATS decision-making process. CATS’ Facebook page is used by staff to interact with riders and can be leveraged to push out information regarding service changes and opportunities for the public to participate in CATS’ decision-making process.
- **CATS’ Website** – CATS’ website, www.brcats.com, is one of the primary sources of information for CATS’ riders and the general public. Several tools are available on the site to communicate service changes and notify the public of opportunities to participate in CATS’ decision-making processes. These include “Recent News” that appears as short summaries on the home page and, when selected, can lead to longer news items amongst meeting agendas, minutes, and links to route maps, customer surveys. In addition, all route schedules and many documents are available in either Spanish or Vietnamese upon request and the website can be translated into both Spanish and Vietnamese.
- **E-mails to CATS Customers**– To date, all electronic notifications are sent out by a CATS’ mass e-mail subscription service. Customers can sign up on CATS’ website to receive e-mails from CATS. In addition, staff has the flexibility to target e-mail communications to subgroups of CATS ridership, such as interested members of the public about updates to project schedules, upcoming meetings or workshops, online surveys for feedback, and any other agency activities.
- **Rider Alerts** are small notices or pamphlets that fit in the existing schedule holders on the buses. These can be placed on all buses or be targeted to the routes and times that would be impacted by a change or other informational campaign.
- **Posters** at CATS Terminals: Printed sogms are posted around CATS’ terminal, including designated news bulletin areas within the waiting room and at the customer service window.



- **Mailers to partners:** These printed materials can be distributed via mail to CATS' partners. They can include letters to key staff at these locations and additional posters or other materials to post around their offices.
- **Paid ads** in local media: CATS can publish paid advertisements in the local newspaper of record, *The Advocate*, community newsletters, and local broadcast channels. In addition to paid advertisements can be translated into Spanish and Vietnamese upon request.
- **CATS Connects:** CATS Connects serves as an educational resource library that houses informational materials, branding assets, imagery and archived social graphics and news.
- **Customer Surveys** CATS conducts a Customer Satisfaction Survey to collect and analyze customer opinions regarding all aspects of service, update CATS customer profiles and travel patterns, and compare benchmark scores with similar transit agencies. The latest survey was administered on-board all fixed-route CATS services in the Spring of 2021. CATS is administering a survey of the paratransit riders that will begin soon and is intended to be conducted each year.
- **Press releases** – Press releases aim to generate news coverage of CATS' events, changes, public meetings, etc. They are distributed via e-mail to CATS' communications contact list and posted on the News section of CATS' website
- **Public Meetings** – The backbone of CATS' public participation efforts. Public meetings are held monthly and are open to the public. There, discussions between interested parties, often including riders, can provide feedback on CATS' activities. It is a question-and-answer format and an open dialogue with a member of the CATS staff to make sure comments stay focused on the proposed change and that everyone has a chance to ask questions. Federal regulations and comments do NOT require a public meeting and do not go into the public record.
- **Public Hearings** - A public hearing is required by federal or state regulations where comments from the public go into the public record. A public hearing is governed by rules concerning who speaks when and for how long and is overseen by a CATS official. A public hearing is NOT a question-and-answer format.
- **Community Events** – CATS staff make sure that informational tables are at community events and CATS Terminals, where customers can find shared information about changes to service, new initiatives, or community resources. CATS also found that having technical staff available at outreach events in addition to customer service and communications staff can allow for more detailed conversations with customers and members of the public.
- **CATS' Board Meetings** - The Board of Commissioners meet on the third Tuesday of each month at 4:30 p.m. at either two locations: the CATS administrative building (350 N. Donmoor St, Baton Rouge, LA 70802) or the BREC Recreation & Park Commission (3140 N Sherwood Forest Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70814). These meetings are open to the public and include an opportunity for the public to comment on any item relating to transit. In addition, there will be cards for members of the public to complete (this applies to everyone wishing to speak at the board meetings, except the board members themselves; all employees wishing to speak must complete the cards as well).
- **Public Comments** – CATS is always open to and accepting of public comments, regardless of whether they were given as part of an organized effort. Formal public

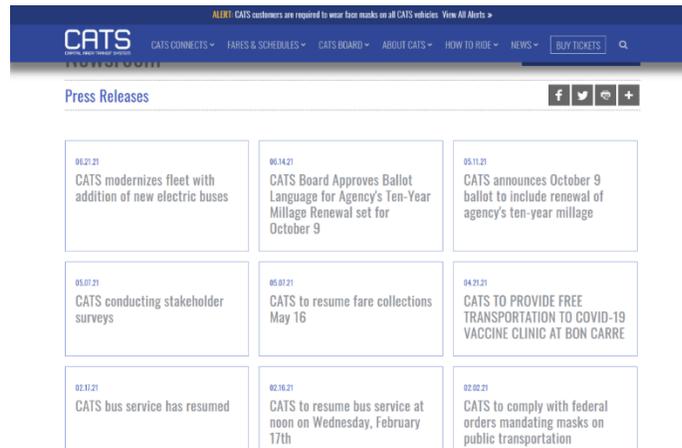
comment periods solicit comments on major public involvement efforts around an agency service or system change. Comments from comment cards are valuable for open-ended discussions. In addition, open-ended questionnaires are distributed in printed form and digital form.

Comments are accepted anytime by the following methods. In addition, special projects may have a public outreach period where one can comment on that specific project.

- Share comments by phone at (225)389-8282,
- E-mail comments at catscustomerservice@brcats.com
- Post comments on CATS' Facebook page or Twitter page @BTRCATS
- Mail comments to CATS at 2250 Florida Blvd. Baton Rouge, LA 70802
- Share comments in person by attending a public meeting

Public Outreach (January 2021 to August 2022)

- Board meetings were held monthly to give updates on administrative matters and act on plans, contracts, updates to policies, and financial statements.
- Numerous public meetings were held to receive public input on changes in routes and schedules
- During the fall of 2016 to the fall of 2020, route adjustments and service changes were made in order to maintain route efficiency and improve service to the system.
- CATS created and distributed Customer Surveys to gather updated transit trip information and behavioral data from CATS' riders in the spring of 2021. These efforts help the agency know the needs of the riders.
- The BRT Project conducted two public meetings in May of 2022.
- The Comprehensive Operational Analysis conducted eight meetings in the month of February 2022.
- CATS Staff attended many community events that included 8 events in the month of August 2022.
- CATS Staff set up a table at the main terminal with all Title VI policies available for comment on 8-26-2022 and 8-31-2022 and received a total of 23 comments on general concerns that were forwarded to the appropriate department and added an additional 32 riders that signed up for the rider alert email list. There were no comments concerning the policies.
- In addition, CATS staff posted on social media several times with a link to the new policies and allowed for comment for 10 days. No responses were received.



COVID-19 Meeting Accommodations (March 2020)

During normal circumstances, meeting times and convenient locations for target audiences are crucial to providing meaningful opportunities for public participation. However, due to the pandemic, alternative methods of public involvement have taken place.

In accord with Act No. 302, meetings held beginning June 2020 to December 2021 were held virtually to reduce and limit the spread of COVID-19 in Louisiana and preserve the health and safety of all public members; the Governor declared the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. In addition, he ordered that it is necessary to limit public gatherings in a single place at the same time to avoid individuals being close to one another.

As a result of the public health emergency, the limitations imposed on public gatherings and personal interactions, and the risks associated with the participation of members in a physical meeting of the Board of Commissioners for Capital Area Transit System and Public Transportation Commission as a result of this certifies that to protect the lives, property, health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Louisiana, it is necessary to conduct the meeting for regular business via teleconference and/or online to assure the presence of a quorum of voting members.

Act No. 302 of the 2020 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature enacted La. R.S. 42:17.1, as subsequently amended by Act No. 43 of the 2020 Second Extraordinary Session, allows a public body to conduct business “via electronic means” if specific requirements are met.

Equity Considerations

CATS recognizes that minority and low-income populations have historically and systematically been excluded from participating in public decision-making. Moreover, due to persistent societal and cultural influences, it can be challenging to ensure diverse public participation in CATS’ decision-making, despite the concerted efforts described in this plan. CATS, therefore, recognizes the need to plan carefully to design inclusive outreach processes and build in critical steps to consider whether a public participation process and its outcomes are achieving the intended results.

Outcomes

The outcomes of public participation will be reported openly and transparently. The expectation is that, once community members have participated in a process, CATS owes it to them to say how their participation influenced the outcome. In addition, CATS should demonstrate that it explored the suggestions and recommendations of the public and considered that as part of the process.

Conclusion

This PPP must, first and foremost, demonstrate how CATS is accountable to the public. The strategic approach, goals, and guiding principles CATS has established are intended to foster public participation by providing early, continuous, and meaningful public engagement processes for its stakeholders regardless of race, color, or national origin, including populations and individuals who may be underserved because of limited English

proficiency (LEP), minority or socioeconomic status, or disability. The methods and techniques employed by CATS help increase public participation rates, particularly among those individuals and populations that are often overlooked or underrepresented.

While the methods and techniques used during the public participation process may vary according to each circumstance, CATS will make every effort to achieve the standards it has set and design public outreach efforts to most effectively reach out to the diverse populations throughout the CATS service area. As a living document, the plan may evolve according to the demographic makeup of CATS' communities and their unique needs and CATS' evaluation of its public participation effectiveness.

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