



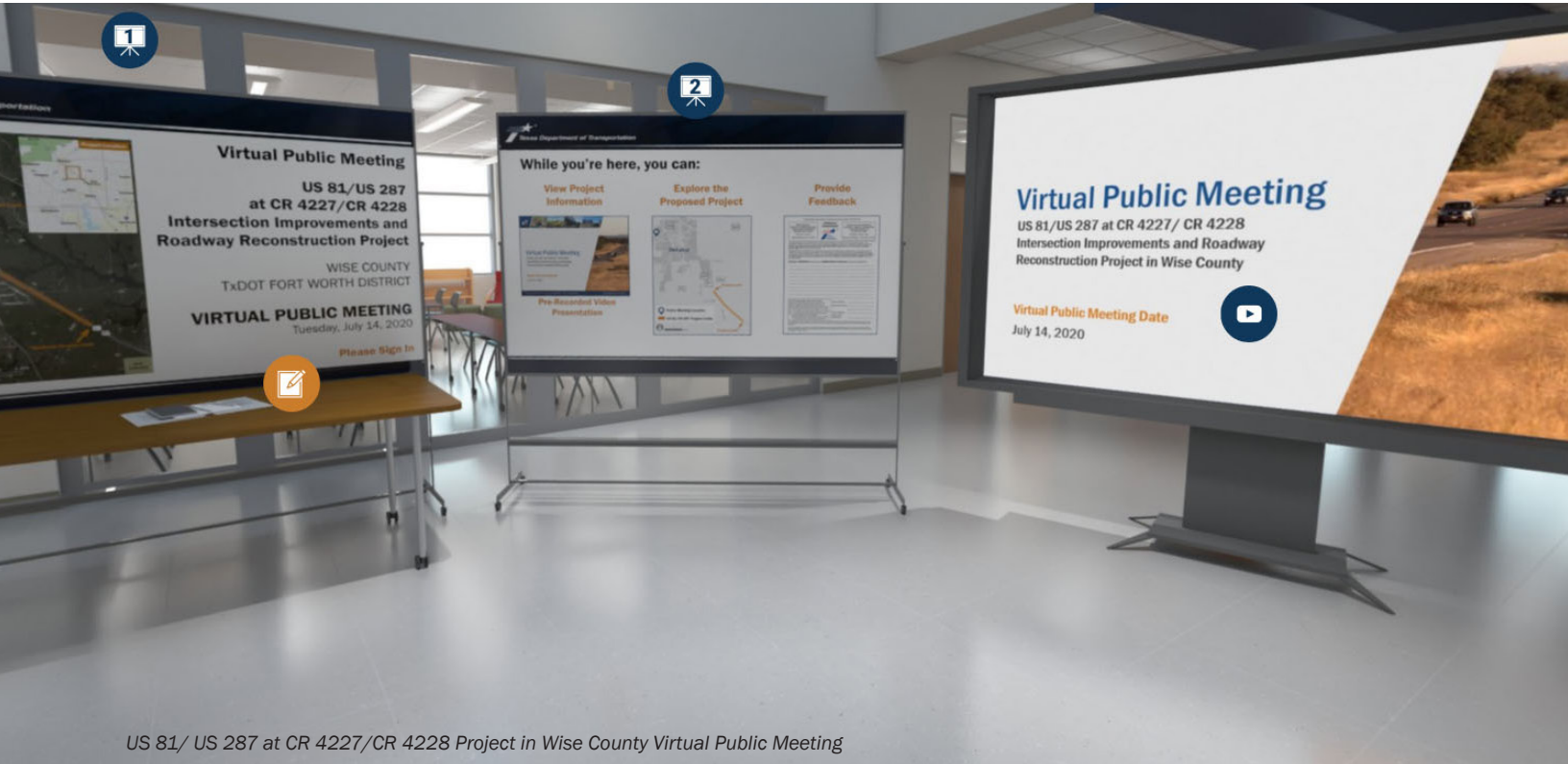
Virtual Public Involvement Summary

**March 15, 2020 to
June 11, 2020**

Public Involvement Section,
Transportation Planning &
Programming

July 2020





US 81/ US 287 at CR 4227/CR 4228 Project in Wise County Virtual Public Meeting

Executive Summary

TxDOT's virtual public involvement (PI) efforts, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, aimed to keep projects moving while maintaining an acceptable level of PI in accordance with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations.

From March 15, 2020 to June 11, 2020, TxDOT hosted 44 virtual PI events with high levels of digital engagement. TxDOT staff worked closely with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) representatives to determine appropriate virtual methodologies.

34 meetings - 10 hearings

16 NEPA events

28 non-NEPA events

26 of these events offered a second language option



A unique visitor is an individual using a device (mobile, desktop or laptop) who visits a page or multiple pages on a website one or more times during a browsing session. The number of visits is how many times the pages are viewed.

15,104

total number of unique visitors to individual public meeting and hearing notice pages during this period

COVID-19 Response and Strategic Guidance

TxDOT developed guidance on how to transition in-person meetings and hearings to a virtual setting along with best practices, which were quickly developed and provided to agency staff. Ten new NEPA-compliant formats for virtual PI were released as part of an updated ENV Public Involvement Toolkit. TxDOT created four virtual PI guidance and best practice documents and distributed them to the agency, along with the creation of a Virtual PI Crossroads library and ongoing PI support.



Connecting Our Communities - Special Edition - Virtual Meetings/Hearings, Spring 2020

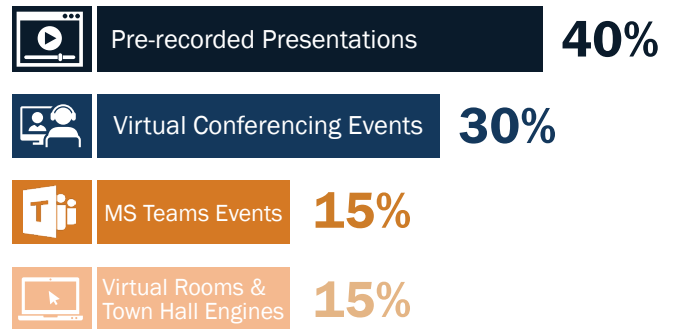
Web Engagement Metrics

Information gathered on virtual events confirms how often individuals are accessing and consuming online content.

The data measures the general public’s overall interest and participation in projects as in-person public meetings or hearings were not an option.

Forty-three virtual online notice web pages and 22 pre-recorded presentations on YouTube were analyzed; the findings below are based on unique visitor counts.

Overview of Meetings and Hearings Format



TxDOT virtual meetings and hearings were conducted in a variety of formats, most of which included providing a pre-recorded presentation.



Most visited:

Austin UTP 2020 Update Virtual Hearing Web Page - 3,387 unique visitors



Most viewed pre-recorded presentation:

Beaumont 10/69 Interchanges EA Virtual Hearing - 545 unique viewers



Unique visitors:

Notice pages Median Unique Visitors - 207, Videos Median Unique Visitors - 121

Expanding Reach: Virtual and Past In-Person Meeting/Hearing Attendance

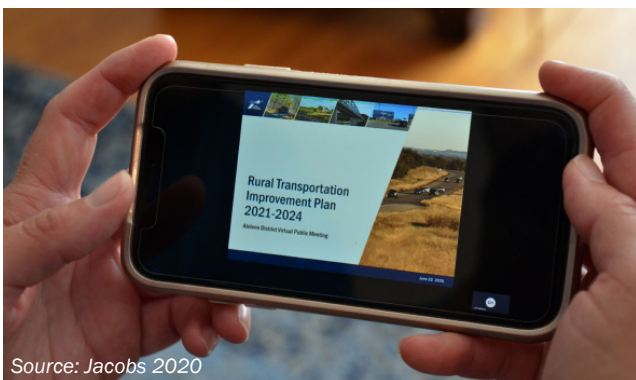
- The median attendance for in-person meetings, open houses and hearings in 2019 was 41 people.
- Live virtual meetings and hearings had a median of 53 unique visitors per event.
- Pre-recorded videos had a median of 121 unique viewers.
- The median attendance to in-person Rural Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) meetings in 2018 was 8 people per meeting. Comparatively, the 2020 virtual RTIP meetings had a median number of 171 unique viewers per meeting on YouTube.



RTIP San Antonio Video Presentation with American Sign Language translation

- On average, a **TxDOT website visitor spent 3:31 minutes viewing content**, surpassing the industry average of 2 to 3 minutes.
- On average, **visitors viewed 30% of the pre-recorded presentation videos**, irrespective of length.

What We Heard



Source: Jacobs 2020

The virtual public meeting we held had more attendees than we have had at an in-person meeting of the same type. It was not project specific. It was a meeting to revise our RTIP. We typically have very few show up in person, but with it being held virtually we reached more people in this case.

– Atlanta District



Very well presented presentation tonight in regards to the I-10/69 project. It was easy to follow and explained everything very clearly.

– Member of the public on the I-10/69 online public hearing



Lessons Learned Survey

A survey was distributed to TxDOT staff and other Departments of Transportation (DOTs) across the country gathering 63 responses representing 19 TxDOT Districts, 3 TxDOT Divisions and 6 State DOTs. Respondents pointed out the following top findings about the use of virtual public involvement events.

+ Advantages



- Accessibility and convenience for the public.



- Lower cost and staff time spent at event.



- Safer option for the public and staff.



- Increased attendance, especially for historically underattended meetings/hearings.



- Efficiency in data collection and staff time.

- Challenges



- Concerns over lack of in-person interactions and two-way communication.



- Potential for technology failures.



- Concerns over inadvertent exclusion of under-served population.



- Format limitations and different levels of technology literacy.

Many survey respondents stated that the level of participation, in this case judged as attendance, was higher for virtual meetings and hearings than those they usually observe during in-person events.



Lessons Learned

- Plan early and rehearse everything!
- Follow PI/ENV/FHWA tools and guidance.
- Ensure accessibility and plan for traditional mail-out outreach if needed.
- Content should be concise and visually appealing.
- Strive to make the experience easy for the public.



Source: Jacobs 2020

Recommendations

Based on the analysis and survey responses done as part of this summary, the following are the top 3 topics

Advancing Virtual Involvement at TxDOT

Agency Leadership

- Schedule an on-going quarterly review of the effectiveness of public involvement (virtual and in-person); discuss key challenges, lessons learned and potential opportunities.
- Collaborate with FHWA on an ongoing basis to advance virtual public involvement practices; establish quarterly meetings between FHWA, ENV, Agency Leadership and the Director of Public Involvement.
- Promote agency efforts and best practices.

PI Section

- Establish regular collection and analysis of web engagement metrics.
- Continue refinement and creation of virtual public involvement resources.
- Establish internal agency partnerships to provide districts with data on virtual engagement performance and particular population needs.
- Develop follow-up tools or protocols to evaluate the user experience of the virtual event.

District Level

- Allow for appropriate meeting and hearing preparation time.
- Build technology acumen and redundancy.
- Leverage PI support to produce concise and engaging content.
- Expand use of social media as a promotional tool for virtual events.

