



Virtual Public Meeting or Hearing Technology Options

A “virtual” public meeting or hearing is a meeting that is held online, in which members of the public log-on to the meeting and participate via the Internet. A virtual public meeting may be held in the following two situations: (1) as a *supplement* to an in-person public meeting, or (2) as a *substitute* for an in-person public meeting when the Governor and/or President declares a health or other emergency or TxDOT determines that an in-person public meeting should not be held out of concerns for public health or safety. Please see the [Environmental Division’s Public Involvement Toolkit](#) for additional guidance.

This is a living document, and the following describes the various technology tools available to implement a virtual meeting/hearing.

When deciding if a virtual public meeting is right for your project or effort please consider the following questions:

- What input do you need from the community?
- What is your project timeline? Do you have flexibility to postpone the meeting until risk is gone?
- Will this conversation feel relevant to community members at this time? Can they fulfill the promises of engagement at this time?
- What input do you need from the community?
- Have you researched the population you are serving? How will you serve the EJ and LEP communities in the project area?

Once you have consulted with your team on the above questions and believe a virtual public meeting/hearing is right for your effort, The PI Section recommends the following available options that can be recorded and uploaded to the TxDOT YouTube account and posted on either the meetings page or project page. Uploading on YouTube would also help with ADA access because YouTube provides the option for closed captioning.

The PI Section also recommends developing a comprehensive outreach plan; outreach ideas can be found on the PI Section Crossroads page. It is very important that districts go above and beyond the minimal NEPA requirements to promote these online opportunities and ensure all LEP and EJ communities are reached.

TxDOT offers the following three options for a virtual meeting/hearing – these are the options that can be done “in house.”

1. Live via WebEx Meeting

Description: A public meeting hosted through a live WebEx provides access through an online link with an option for sign-in or not and a separate call-in line. Staff can host and share screens between presenters and presentation can be run and recorded within software. Participants can speak or use a chat option.

- **Benefits:** interactive meeting with ability to ask real-time questions and answers session or comments; can count the number of people who sign in and participate; and software available within districts and agency wide
- **Challenges:** allowing verbal comments would require you to unmute groups which could create unwanted background noise and cut-ins; would require more than one person to run the WebEx recommend a presenter and another person to run and monitor chats

2. Recorded WebEx Meeting Without Live Participants

Description: A recorded public meeting is a presentation and script pre-recorded using the WebEx software. Live participants will not be part of the original recording. The recording is posted via a YouTube link on meeting or project page.

- **Benefits:** no background noise; likely to not have as many technical difficulties; pre-recording will give you a chance to redo; district can set up and record presentation within district
- **Challenges:** not as interactive; people cannot ask questions in real time; and cannot count the number of people who participated because there isn't a sign-in option

3. Recorded Voiceover PowerPoint Presentation

Description: With voiceover presentation, public meeting district staff would work with the Media Production team or consultants to provide an audio voiceover of a PowerPoint presentation. The voiceover presentation would then be uploaded to the TxDOT YouTube account and posted on either the meetings page or project webpage.

- **Benefits:** no background noise; and likely to not have as many technical difficulties as a WebEx; Media Production team produces as a video with a voiceover leaving district only responsible for the presentation and script,
- **Challenges:** not interactive; people cannot ask questions in real time; and cannot count the number of people who participated because there isn't a sign-in option, needs a longer lead time for production.

In addition to the above TxDOT options, districts/divisions also have the option of working with a consultant to provide other types of virtual meeting technologies. Following is a list provided by TxDOT consultants that offer alternative virtual meeting options.

Please note: At this time, these cannot be done “in house.” As long as TxDOT consultants ensure that these alternative forms of virtual meeting technologies will still comply with TxDOT and NEPA guidelines than these options can also be considered. Also: If you have heard about other virtual meeting/hearing technologies that should be added to the list, please let the PI Section know.

Other Virtual Meeting/Hearing Technologies

- **Streamling Town Hall (not currently available but can be an option through Jacobs with WA approval)**

Description: A public meeting hosted in webinar format through [GotoMeetings](#). Staff members or other presenters can host a closed-door/private or public meeting and live-stream it. Attendees can submit questions via a chat feature and staff members respond in real time through the livestream feed.

- **Benefits:** Can be linked with video capable board and/or conference rooms (room with tv, internet and phone system). It produces reports on attendance total and participation (list of comments or questions). Subscription includes add-in capabilities (surveys, handout download and Q&A chats), transcripts and record meetings for posting on [txdot.gov](#), layout and URL optimization, and up to 3 Webinars at a time.
- **Challenges:** Requires registration. Has a cost of \$199 a month billed annually. There are less expensive options but they offer less capacity and features.

- **Zoom Video Conferencing (not currently available but can be an option through Jacobs with WA approval)**

Description FREE Version: A live Zoom Video Meeting with members of the public accessing the meeting link from any device (desktop, phone, tablet). The meeting can be recorded for upload to a YouTube account and posting on [txdot.gov](#).

- **Benefits:** Public access through a link without having to log-in. Breakout rooms allow you to separate up to 50 specific discussions from the main meeting. Breakout room participants have full audio, video and screen share capabilities. It also has a Video Conference option, allowing users to join in by calling in if they don't have access to the sound in the video or those who just want to listen in.
- **Challenges:** Only has capacity for 100 people per meeting. Putting a member of the public into a breakout room separates them from the main meeting. Meeting recording only covers the main meeting. 40-minute limit. It is highly interactive, might not be best for a public hearing.

Description Business Version: A live Zoom Video Meeting with members of the public accessing the meeting link from any device (desktop, phone, tablet). The meeting can be recorded for upload to a YouTube account.

- **Benefits:** Public access through a link without having to log-in. Capacity between 500 - >1000 meeting members. URL and interface can be customized. Cloud-based recording. Auto-generated cloud recorded transcripts. Up to 10 people can host at the same time.
- **Challenges:** Incurs a \$20 cost per month charged yearly with a cap of 300 participants per meeting [\$70 per 500 and \$110 per 1,000]. Putting a member of the public into a breakout room separates them from the main meeting. Meeting recording only covers the main meeting. The features available are highly interactive, and cannot be turned off, if the intent is only to deliver information this might not be best for a public hearing.