Seattle Department of Transportation

RIDE NOW

Lessons Learned from Inclusive Planning

Seattle Department of Transportation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) received a grant application from the Transit Planning 4 All program to inclusively plan and implement a mobility on demand solution with and for older adults and people with disabilities. This document summarizes our approach and lessons learned in the **inclusive planning process**. For more information on the pilot implementation, check out our Ride Now webpage and our summary on the Ride Now pilot.

OUR APPROACH

- Convene a compensated steering committee of end users to plan, implement, and evaluate a mobility on demand pilot by and for older adults and people with disabilities.
- Use the Pathway to Inclusion to measure inclusiveness in the planning process from the participants' perspective.
- Partner with Community Liaisons to expand reach of engagement activities.

SUCCESSES

- Participant compensation
- Inclusive engagement as a throughline rather than a phase
- Co-leadership and co-creation with community stakeholders
- Emphasis on responsiveness, trust, and existing relationships

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Virtual engagement
- Language access
- Delayed start and limited pilot duration
- Driver engagement was missing

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Inclusion of participants in the development of new programs is both feasible and enormously valuable to producing a product that meets people's needs.
    - Inclusive, accessible engagement should occur throughout a project, from the ideation, planning, and design phases through implementation and evaluation.
    - Co-leadership and co-creation with community stakeholders, where power and decision-making are shared, make a transformative difference in the government-community relationship.
- Compensating participants for their time and input is critical. Compensation shows participants that they are valued and supports participants staying engaged through lengthy planning processes.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, SDOT applied for and received an Inclusive Mobility on Demand grant from the Transit Planning 4 All program, which is sponsored by the US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living.

One of SDOT's key goals is to partner with community to build an equitable transportation system, and this project has directly advanced that goal from the outset. Our grant application was based on an idea from a community stakeholder to build on a 2019 SDOT pilot project called Rideshare to Transit, which offered people a discount on their Uber, Lyft, or ReachNow rides if they connected to a nearby transit station instead of driving downtown. A community stakeholder with a disability later approached SDOT to ask why this discount wasn't always available for people with disabilities, as it had made accessing her local transit station much easier while it was available. We explored the idea further and partnered to find and secure funding to turn the idea into a mobility pilot.

INCLUSIVE PLANNING GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND APPROACH

In our grant application, SDOT laid out the following goals, objectives, strategies, and intended outcomes to guide our inclusive planning process. Once we received funding, we aligned our inclusive planning activities to advance our goals and objectives.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS AT OUR IN-PERSON MEETING IN MARCH 2022.

	Goals, objectives, and strategies from our grant application	Our approach in the inclusive planning process
Goals	Meaningfully engage key stakeholders in defining the problem, developing proposed solutions, and implementing the proposed solution holistically.	We convened a steering committee of stakeholders (older adults, people with disabilities, and partner organizations who work with or provide services to these populations) and paid steering committee members for their time and participation on the project.
	Rather than starting with specific solutions in mind, develop potential solutions through a broad and intentional stakeholder engagement process.	We remained open about the nature and details of the mobility on demand solution we piloted, and we remained open to the goals and objectives changing as a result of participant engagement.
Objectives	Include stakeholders (end users/eligible riders) on the project team and in all phases of the project, from ideation and planning to implementation and evaluation.	We met monthly as a steering committee from March 2021 through June 2022, covering all phases of planning and piloting (testing) a mobility on demand service for older adults and people with disabilities. For more information, refer to the timeline of what we covered at each steering committee meeting.
	Employ a participant-centered approach to: • Identify the mobility challenges faced by the focus populations (older adults and people with disabilities), especially related to safely and conveniently accessing transit • Collaboratively brainstorm potential solutions to the identified barriers • Collectively determine which solutions to implement with available funding	We worked directly with the steering committee to define the problems, brainstorm solutions, and make decisions about which solution and what features to test in the pilot implementation. The steering committee also developed and distributed a stakeholder survey in fall 2021 to gather input from more potential riders beyond themselves.
	Compensate stakeholders for all participation on the steering committee in a timely fashion.	We paid steering committee members $100 per hour for their participation and input.
	Distinguish between needs of people with disabilities and older adults.	The steering committee included people from a variety of backgrounds and there were often different perspectives on how we should proceed on a given decision. We structured our meetings to give everyone an opportunity to share, and then regularly asked people for additional thoughts in the monthly feedback form.
		• Participants reported appreciating our robust discussions, noting that the diversity within and between older adults and people with disabilities often feels overlooked or oversimplified by transportation agencies. We also did not assume that one mobility option (or one provider) would work for all participants and remained open to using multiple providers to meet diverse participant needs.
	Empower participants and recognize when they are already empowered.	We gave participants room to take increasing levels of ownership and leadership over project activities and decisions. For example: • One participant co-led the entire project alongside the SDOT project manager. • Other steering committee members participated in and even led subcommittees outside of regular monthly meetings. We also tried to recognize where participants didn't need any help or training.
	Use the Pathway to Inclusion (image below) to track inclusiveness (from the participants' perspective) and how it changes over time.	After each monthly meeting, we asked participants to tell us where they thought the project was on the Pathway to Inclusion.

	Goals, objectives, and strategies from our grant application	Our approach in the inclusive planning process
Strategies Informed by the Inclusive Planning Toolkit developed by Hopelink and the King County Mobility Coalition in a prior Transit Planning 4 All grant cycle.	Host accessible meetings—including live captioning, interpretation, alternative text for images, and translation of communications into multiple languages—and follow universal design guidelines for all documents.	We made our meetings and engagement activities accessible to our specific participants, which included: • Hiring live captioners to type captions (rather than relying on the video conferencing software's auto-caption functions). • Minimizing our use of visuals and verbally describing any visuals we did use. • Asking participants to share any access needs prior to and at the beginning of each meeting. We also made our broader, public-facing materials as accessible as possible by using multiple formats (e.g., written text, images, and videos with ASL interpretation and voiceover narration) and making materials available in 12 languages: American Sign Language (ASL), Amharic, Chinese (spoken: Mandarin and Cantonese; written: Traditional and Simplified), English, Japanese, Korean, Oromo, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese.
	Use people-centered language and terms that participants/stakeholders use, rather than the jargon used by government staff.	We followed the steering committee's lead in how we referred to participants (e.g., "older adults"/"seniors" and "people with disabilities"/"disabled people") and tried to use plain language terms wherever possible.
	Share all workgroup materials in advance to allow participants to prepare beforehand.	We typically shared meeting agendas one week in advance and meeting slides one day in advance.
	Collect feedback after each engagement/ meeting.	We asked participants to give feedback each month after our meeting, addressing barriers and incorporating suggestions as we went. The type of feedback we sought included: • Participant satisfaction with the planning process • Participants' perceived impact of their input • Project inclusiveness according to the Pathway to Inclusion (i.e., which level) • Barriers to participation • Input on key decisions

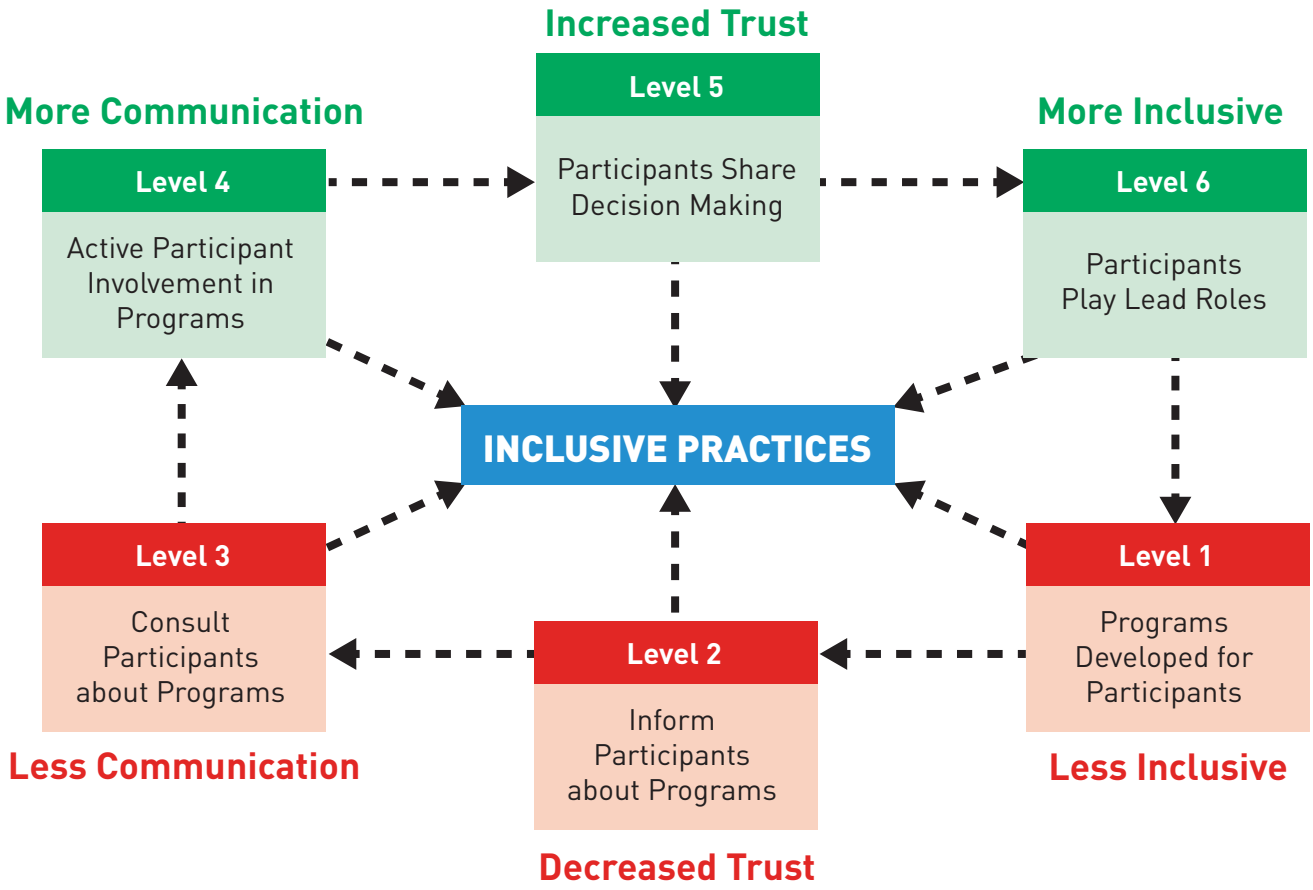
INTENDED OUTCOMES

We believe we achieved the intended outcomes we listed in our grant application:

- Comprehensive, shared understanding of mobility barriers to accessing transit faced by people with disabilities and older adults, including how those challenges differ for the target populations and across demographic factors such as income and race
- First-hand experience with managing and participating in a virtual inclusive planning process
- Collaborative implementation and evaluation of a new pilot based on engagement conducted in the planning phase
- Process improvements to transportation planning and enhanced commitment to inclusive processes
- Precedent and/or expanded practice of meaningful compensation for stakeholder participation
- Improved and more dignified experience for stakeholders engaged in planning and implementation

PATHWAY TO INCLUSION

Improvements in Program Planning, Operations, and Services



THE PATHWAY TO INCLUSION IS A TOOL DEVELOPED BY TRANSIT PLANNING 4 ALL TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN DIFFERENT LEVELS AND TYPES OF INCLUSIVENESS IN A PLANNING PROCESS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT HTTPS://TRANSITPLANNING4ALL.ORG/RESOURCES/PATHWAY-TO-INCLUSION/.

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON) Community Liaisons help connect the City of Seattle to historically and currently disinvested communities. For the Ride Now project, we partnered with a cohort of 11 Community Liaisons with connections to older adults and people with disabilities across the Seattle area and in the following communities and populations:

- Chinese/Cantonese-speaking
- Chinese/Mandarin-speaking
- Eritrean/Tigrinya-speaking
- Ethiopian/Amharic-speaking
- Filipino/Tagalog-speaking
- Korean/Korean-speaking
- Latino/Spanish-speaking
- Somali/Somali-speaking
- Vietnamese/Vietnamese-speaking
- Unhoused or unstably-housed people

Community Liaisons helped expand the reach of our engagement activities across three phases:

- Phase 1: Stakeholder survey
    - The engagement subcommittee designed and distributed a survey to potential riders to ask for input on critical pilot design decisions, like types of eligible rides, service area, how to book and pay for the ride, and how high to set the subsidy. Check out the aggregated survey results here.

- We hosted an online survey and distributed the link via our networks and communication channels, but steering committee members and Community Liaisons also interviewed people in their communities using the survey as a guide—with this approach, we reached over 400 potential riders.

- Phase 2: Voucher distribution during pilot

  - While individual riders could request vouchers directly from SDOT, steering committee members and Community Liaisons also distributed paper Yellow Cab vouchers directly to eligible riders in their communities.

- Phase 3: Collecting stories of impact

  - After the pilot closed in June, steering committee members and Community Liaisons collected stories of impact from riders.

Learn more about the Community Liaison program here: www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/community-liaisons.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS WORKED WITH A VIDEO PRODUCER TO DEVELOP AN INTRODUCTORY VIDEO IN ASL AND WITH VOICEOVER NARRATION AND CAPTIONS IN 11 OTHER LANGUAGES.

TWO COMMUNITY LIAISONS RECEIVING YELLOW CAB VOUCHERS FOR DISTRIBUTION.

WHAT WE LEARNED

SUCCESSES

Participant compensation was key to steering committee members feeling valued and sustaining their participation through the life of the project.

- We paid participants $100 per hour to demonstrate our understanding of the value of their sharing their lived experience and to cover indirect expenses associated with virtual and in-person engagement.
    - We based this rate on the $75 per hour rate paid to Community Liaisons at the time of the project, with the additional $25 per hour meant to cover any indirect costs (e.g., transportation, necessary internet and computer equipment, etc.).
    - Recognizing that $100 per hour may be cost-prohibitive for some agencies, we learned that any compensation is better than no compensation, and other projects should aim to compensate participants at the highest rate they can afford.
- We compensated participants for all of their work on the project, including attending steering committee and subcommittee meetings, working with vendors, providing feedback, and travel time as necessary for the project.
    - Participants submitted monthly invoices detailing their participation activities, and they usually received direct deposits or paper checks within two weeks.

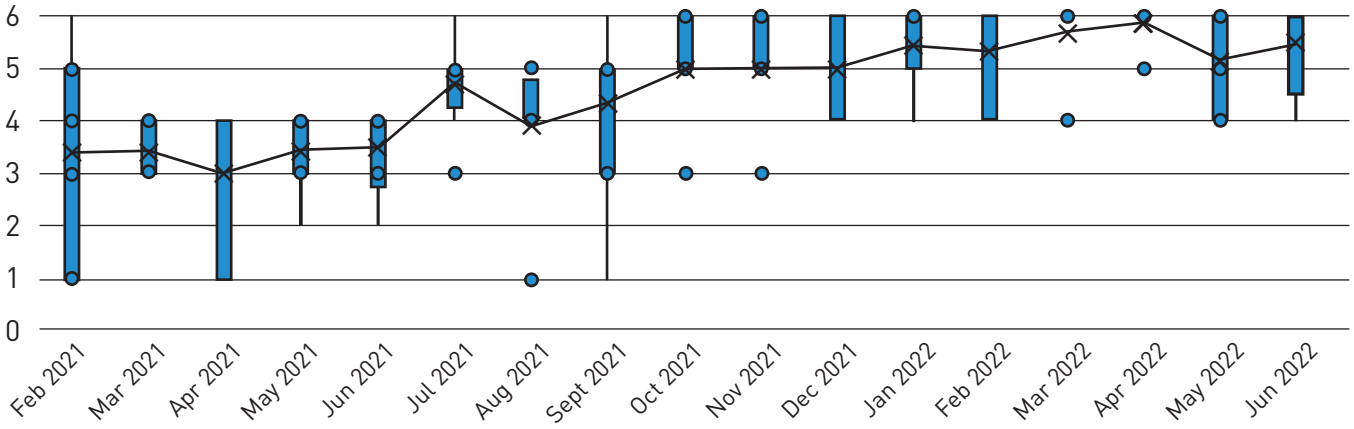
Inclusive engagement as a throughline rather than a phase: Instead of treating engagement as a single phase of the project—something that starts and stops in the middle of the project—we treated it as a constant feature by engaging participants at every stage of the project, from ideation and planning to implementation and evaluation.

"Co-creation of a program with community should not end when the planning phase is over. Our project was constantly making adjustments after the pilot launched that required the steering committee to weigh in. Maintaining that partnership and engagement through implementation is essential."

– Steering committee member

PATHWAY TO INCLUSION

As Reported by Steering Committee Members in Monthly Feedback Forms



- Transportation planners may find some stages of project development less relevant or appropriate for public engagement (for example, purchasing and procurement), but participants appreciated being offered opportunities to engage. When they were less interested or available, they declined to participate in certain activities, but often at least some people were curious about and eager to engage in even the more bureaucratic processes (for example, several steering committee members participated in reviewing quotes from potential ride voucher providers).

Inclusiveness increased over time, according to steering committee members in monthly feedback forms.

- At the beginning of the project, steering committee members gave a wide range of grades on our project's inclusiveness, averaging out to Level 3 (consult participants about programs) for the first several months.

- By summer 2021, participants were reporting inclusiveness at Level 4 (active participant involvement in programs) on average.

- By the end of the project, the range narrowed, and steering committee members reported our project's inclusiveness as averaging between Level 5 (participants share decision-making) and Level 6 (participants play lead roles).

Co-leadership with community stakeholders made a big difference in participants willing to place trust in the City and the process.

- The partnership between an SDOT project manager and a community stakeholder co-lead was a rare example of sharing power and decision-making authority.

- Steering committee members also took increasing levels of ownership and leadership over different aspects of pilot design over the course of the project, with several members participating on and even leading subcommittees.

"It's not common for people with disabilities or older adults to lead development of programs that are supposed to be for them."

– Steering committee member

- Participants noted that this project made space for representative leadership, which helped them feel seen and invested in the project's success.

Responsiveness to input: Participants on the steering committee reported feeling heard and feeling like their ideas and opinions had an impact on the direction of the project.

- In accordance with one of the key goals for the inclusive planning process, SDOT remained open about the ultimate mobility on demand solution and followed the steering committee's lead to a ride voucher program that covered short trips to any destination, not just trips to and from transit.

"It is saying a lot that an agency was willing to make itself vulnerable and listen to outside ideas and actually incorporate them."

– Steering committee member

Emphasis on trust and existing relationships: We recruited steering committee members first from the group of people (individuals and potential partner organizations) that wrote letters of support for our grant application. Then we asked those who were available to participate on the steering committee to recommend others from their networks and communities that would like to participate in an inclusive transportation planning process. This word-of-mouth approach to recruitment worked well, resulting in everyone on the steering committee having an existing relationship with at least one other person, while including people who weren't already involved or engaged in City of Seattle planning processes.

- We also relied on a "trusted network" model to both spread the word about the Ride Now pilot and distribute vouchers through existing relationships that our steering committee members, Community Liaisons, and partner organizations have with eligible riders.
    - This "warm connection" allowed SDOT to trust that vouchers were getting to the intended audience, and it allowed riders to turn to someone they already know when they had questions or issues using their vouchers.
- The emphasis on existing relationships also resulted in awareness about the upcoming Ride Now pilot building organically over the year we spent planning it. As a result, there was extremely high demand immediately following the public launch, where other programs often report it taking months to see demand grow for a new benefit.

CHALLENGES

Virtual engagement: Due to the COVID pandemic, engagement with the steering committee and Community Liaisons was almost entirely virtual.

- It was limiting for people to not be able to meet in person due to public health directives and the pandemic, but we made time at every meeting to get to know each other a little better, primarily through opening with "ice-melters" that allowed participants to share something about themselves. By the time we had one in-person meeting to soft-launch the Ride Now pilot, it felt more like a reunion than like meeting for the first time.
- There were also benefits to virtual engagement, namely increased accessibility for people who would struggle to travel to in-person meetings but who have sufficient resources (e.g., personal computer and internet access) to engage virtually. Future projects should consider using a mix of virtual and in-person

engagement to reach people with a variety of access needs and preferences, with an emphasis on whichever method is most accessible and preferred by the primary participants.

Language access: The steering committee included a variety of people with disabilities and older adults, but did not include anyone who communicates primarily in a language other than English.

- We included a cohort of Community Liaisons in our engagement activities to help us reach potential riders who communicate primarily in languages other than English, and we made most of our public-facing materials available in 12 languages, but we missed an opportunity to expand access to planning processes across language barriers.

Delayed start and limited pilot duration: The project experienced various delays at the outset, resulting in the pilot implementation timeline shrinking to only about 3-4 months.

- Delays included getting the steering committee familiar with City processes, such as the need for City Council approval to accept grant funds, setting up compensation agreements, and the medium purchase process required for selecting voucher providers and purchasing the ride vouchers.

- Participants expressed frustration and lack of clarity in the early months of the project and then feelings of being rushed and desires to keep the pilot live for longer at the end of the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

Engagement doesn't end with participants (riders) – remember to engage vendors (drivers), too: There were some issues with Yellow Cab drivers not accepting vouchers from riders (for more information, refer to our summary on the Ride Now pilot implementation), and we struggled to address these issues due to a lack of connection or working relationship with drivers for selected vendors.

- Yellow Cab offers a variety of voucher programs with different rules, and pre-pandemic it even started moving away from paper vouchers altogether. The Ride Now pilot introduced a new paper voucher program for drivers to learn and didn't last long enough for all drivers to become familiar with the details.

- In future projects like this, we recommend spending more time and effort building relationships with drivers, giving them reason to feel invested in the program, understanding their needs and concerns, and trying out their ideas.

Individual participants and partner organizations have different compensation needs: We compensated individual participants and partner organizations the same way: $100/hour with monthly invoices detailing how they spent their time.

- This approach was designed to be flexible and result in regular, timely payments for the individual participants, but it wasn't very convenient for the partner organizations, whose representatives had to track their hourly participation on this specific project separately from their other related work.

- It would have been easier on the partner organizations and demonstrated more respect for their time and contributions if we had set up a stipend or structured the contract differently to minimize the hourly tracking they needed to do.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In reflecting on the inclusive planning process, the steering committee offered the following recommendations to future project managers working on transportation projects and programs:

Grow the practice of conducting inclusive and compensated engagement as a regular component of project management, especially for mobility programs with a specific focus population.

- Steering committees with a mix of end users and relevant partner organizations are effective for long-term stakeholder engagement.
    - Our steering committee had about 10 regular participants, and that size worked well for our project. Participants suggested we could have used a few more older adults.
    - It is possible and even beneficial to recruit a steering committee through word of mouth and existing relationships.
- Compensating participants for their time and input is critical to demonstrating that their contributions are valued.
    - Participants sharing from their lived experiences should be compensated like consultants, with hourly rates up to (or even exceeding) $100 per hour.
    - If this amount is cost-prohibitive, aim to pay participants as much as the organization can afford.
    - Some participants may prefer stipends over hourly payments. Work with potential participants and accounting teams to determine the best possible compensation structure for participants.
    - Include participant compensation in budget requests to help achieve higher compensation rates.
- In addition to (or in place of) convening a steering committee to help guide a project, consider opportunities for the individuals and organizations that will be most impacted by a new project or program to participate in other discrete aspects of project development, such as writing letters of support for grant proposals and participating in surveys, interviews, and storytelling as part of program evaluation.
    - For more suggestions on how to inclusively engage key stakeholders, check out our Tips for Inclusive Planning.

Create opportunities for co-leadership with community stakeholders (members of the public who are part of the community being served and who have connections to others within their community).

Build project manager familiarity with facilitating accessible meetings, including using inclusive language, virtual facilitation, hiring CART captioners, hiring ASL and other spoken language interpreters, using verbal descriptions of visual elements, and providing childcare at in-person meetings.

Train project managers in sharing power with community stakeholders, using a combination of professional development trainings and practice with real-world projects so that project managers are meaningfully challenged and learn what true partnership looks like. Sharing power may not come naturally to many project managers, but it is so valuable in achieving a final product that is responsive to the intended recipients' real needs.

Plan for some participation by agency leaders and decision-makers in engagement activities. Leadership participation, even in a listening role, makes a significant impression on community stakeholders and demonstrates the agency's meaningful investment of time and resources in the inclusive planning process.

- This type of participation is valuable throughout, but especially at the beginning of the project (e.g., when discussing the purpose and when hearing from community stakeholders about their experiences for the first time) and at key junctures where community input directly shapes project decisions.

- Some SDOT leaders outside the project team attended meetings and made time to engage with participants, and these instances stood out to steering committee members as an indication of SDOT's openness to listening and learning. Near the end of the project, steering committee members desired even more leadership participation like this.

Always partner with DON Community Liaisons to expand the reach of any City-led engagement process or new program. Community Liaisons can help City staff hear from people they might not otherwise have access to or even know about, and they can help people who would most benefit from City programs learn about and access them. They also offer incredibly helpful insights and suggestions on engagement activities and aspects of program design based on their lived and professional experiences with a huge variety of public programs.

Always partner with Community Liaisons to expand the reach of any City-led engagement process or new public benefit. Community Liaisons can help City staff hear from people they might not otherwise have access to or even know about, and they can help people who would most benefit from City programs learn about and access them. They also offer incredibly helpful insights and suggestions on engagement activities and aspects of program design based on their lived and professional experiences with a huge variety of public programs.

The Seattle Department of Transportation
700 5th Avenue, Suite 3800
PO Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124-4996
(206) 684-ROAD (7623)
www.seattle.gov/transportation

Seattle
Department of
Transportation

8.2022