

# Public Participation Plan 2023 Annual Evaluation



## OZARKS TRANSPORTATION ORGANIZATION

A METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

**April 4, 2024**

This report was prepared in cooperation with the USDOT, including FHWA and FTA, as well as the Missouri Department of Transportation. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission, the Federal Highway Administration, or the Federal Transit Administration.

## Introduction

The effectiveness of the Ozarks Transportation Organization's Public Participation Plan and public involvement activities are documented and evaluated annually. This annual evaluation is conducted in accordance with the Public Participation Plan 2023 approved by the Board of Directors on July 20, 2023 and as required by Federal Law 20 CFR 450.316. Through these annual evaluations the OTO adjusts and modifies public involvement activities in a list of action items to be undertaken preceding the next annual evaluation.

## Goal

Through continued evaluation, the OTO seeks to improve how information is provided to the public and to enhance public involvement and input. The goal of the evaluation is to utilize quantified performance measures in conjunction with a set of action items to evaluate and improve the provision of information, facilitate public involvement, and increase input.

## Previously Designated Action Items

As part of the 2023 Public Participation Plan Evaluation, four action items were identified to improve outreach and increase public involvement. The four items included:

- Expand and enhance the use of virtual tools to broaden the reach of meaningful public engagement efforts by making participation more convenient, affordable, and enjoyable for greater numbers of people.
- Expand the use of social media to promote the OTO and solicit comments using ads and "boosted" content to target segments of the public for their input and prioritize intentional outreach to members of underserved communities.
- Provide information at a reading level that will allow people of varying levels of education to participate. Writing at the eighth grade reading level or lower is generally accepted.
- Utilize the OTO Equity Index to understand the demographics of affected communities within the OTO that have disproportionate numbers of transportation disadvantaged

or vulnerable populations with the intent of tailoring outreach efforts to include them in the planning process.

## Performance Measures

The OTO has been tracking Public Participation performance measures for several years. This section provides a list of activities and outlets that the OTO monitors and uses as performance measures in the evaluation of the public participation plan.

### Facebook Participation

Date	Followers	Men/Women (%)
August 2013	51	Not Available
August 2014	108	56/43
April 2015	137	52/45
July 2016	175	54/43
March 2017	177	55/43
March 2018	220	56/43
March 2019	234	53/45
March 2020	437	44/55
March 2021	541	43/56
March 2022	550	44.5/55.5
March 2023	744	40/48
March 2024	776	56/44

### Facebook Participation by Location

Date	Battlefield	Springfield	Nixa	Ozark	Republic	Willard	Strafford
August 2014	-	60	4	2	2	-	-
April 2015	-	82	4	4	3	-	-
July 2016	15	72	5	11	7	-	-
March 2017	13	66	5	11	5	-	-
March 2018	3	117	8	13	4	-	-
March 2019	2	129	7	15	5	-	-
March 2020	3	207	21	41	13	-	-
March 2021	4	212	23	46	9	-	-
March 2022	20	208	30	47	38	-	-
March 2023	23	250	42	57	37	12	9
March 2024	29	259	57	57	38	14	11

## Twitter/X Participation

Date	Followers	Following	Tweets
August 2014	57	241	284
April 2015	91	218	628
July 2016	149	216	1,503
March 2017	169	214	1,648
March 2018	185	219	1,712
March 2019	217	289	1,743
March 2020	264	308	1,881
March 2021	264	309	1,964
March 2022	286	351	2,052
March 2023	280	344	2,137
March 2024	290	340	2,245

## Number of Meetings Open to the Public

The OTO attempts to hold six meetings annually for the Board of Directors (BOD) and Technical Planning Committee (TPC). Quarterly meetings are usually the standard for other standing committees like the Local Coordinating Board for Transit (LCBT) and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC).

Each meeting is open to the public and provides an opportunity for the public to share opinions and concerns with OTO leadership and staff. Occasionally, electronic or email meetings are held. The following table shows how many meetings were held for each committee or board per year.

## Meetings Held Annually

Year	BOD	TPC	LCBT	BPAC
2013	6	6	6	6
2014	7*	7*	9	5
2015	8*	8*	5	6
2016	7*	8	4	6
2017	9*†	8*	6	11
2018	8*	7*	3	6
2019	6	7*	3	2
2020	6	7*	4	6
2021	6	8*	4*	6
2022	6	8*	3	4
2023	7	7*	4	7*

\* Indicates an E-meeting was held during the year. †Includes Board of Directors Training Workshop.

## **Press Releases Sent**

The number of press releases sent each year is dependent upon and reflective of current planning activities and the process for which press releases are necessary.

Press releases sent out for **2012 - 41**

Press releases sent out for **2013 - 39**

Press releases sent out for **2014 - 41**

Press releases sent out for **2015 - 57**

Press releases sent out for **2016 - 53**

Press releases sent out for **2017 - 56**

Press releases sent out for **2018 - 54**

Press releases sent out for **2019 - 34**

Press releases sent out for **2020 – 45**

Press releases sent out for **2021 – 23**

Press releases sent out for **2022 – 43**

Press releases sent out for **2023 - 13**

## **Media Coverage of OTO**

The OTO maintains a log of all media articles and stories where OTO was featured or mentioned. The log provides a record of the types of items that are of interest to the media. Furthermore, as press releases continue to be refined, this log could serve as a guidebook to the effectiveness of the press releases.

- Media coverage from October 2014 to December 31, **2014 – 8**
- Media coverage from January 1, 2015 to December 31, **2015 – 20**
- Media coverage from January 1, 2016 to December 31, **2016 – 10**
- Media Coverage from January 1, 2017 to December 31, **2017 – 12**
- Media Coverage from January 1, 2018 to December 31, **2018 – 12**
- Media Coverage from January 1, 2019 to December 31, **2019 – 13**
- Media Coverage from January 1, 2020 to December 31, **2020 – 15**
- Media Coverage from January 1, 2021 to December 31, **2021 – 20**
- Media Coverage from January 1, 2022 to December 31, **2022 – 23**
- Media Coverage from January 1, 2023 to December 31, **2023– 12**

## Website Statistics

The OTO has been tracking website activity utilizing Google Analytics to document usage since 2015. Below are the Google Analytics for ozarkstransportation.org from 2015 to 2023. In 2023 the analytic reports added a new metric, showing engaged sessions, which will be used moving forward. An engaged session is a session that lasts longer than ten seconds and results in other engagement like more than two page or screen views.

### Analytics for the OTO website

Year	Sessions	Users	Page Views	Avg. Session Duration	Male/Female	Percent New Visitors
2015	7,454	4,918	14,926	2:19	54/45	63.3
2016	7,816	4,873	17,339	2:15	N/A	61.3
2017	6,189	3,677	14,041	2:06	57/43	83.9
2018	6,559	3,869	13,911	2:13	58/42	98.1
2019	7,300	4,413	17,338	2:13	55/44	88.8
2020	7,558	5,000	19,160	2:25	N/A	98
2021	14,171	9,987	28,128	1:24	N/A	100
2022	17,623	13,041	33,562	1:24	N/A	90.2
2023	7,491*	8,938	34,193	1:14	N/A	100

\* Engaged sessions

### Legal Ads

Legal ads are utilized as documentation of efforts to include the public in the planning process as per the Public Participation Plan. Affidavits of publication are evidence of compliance with public comment periods by way of advertising in print publications widely circulated in the planning area as required by federal regulations.

Year	No. of Ads Printed
2012	4
2013	7
2014	3
2015	3
2016	6
2017	3
2018	3
2019	4
2020	1

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Ads Printed</b>
2021	4
2022	3
2023	4

### **Public Comment Log**

OTO maintains a Public Incoming Comment Log. This log documents all email, phone, and personal interactions with the public to the extent possible. Ideally, the log will include the individual's:

- Name
- Date and time of comment
- Phone number and/or email address
- Subject or topic of their comment
- Their comment
- Any reply that was given or how the comment was processed

### **OTO Logged Comments**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Comments Received</b>
2013	70
2014	195
2015	63
2016	22
2017	40
2018	16
2019	20
2020	37
2021	187
2022	255
2023	86

## Action Items for 2024

The following action items were identified to enhance Public Participation in 2024. The updated list is based on progress toward previously designated action items and performance measures. The items are recommendations for moving forward and represent refocused objectives for the coming year. The OTO staff will work toward accomplishing the updated action items in advance of the next Public Participation Plan Evaluation. These items include:

- Increase in-person outreach to create more awareness of OTO's plans and programs and target affected populations.
- Continue to update and improve the OTO and the Let's Go Smart webpage to ensure the provided information is accessible to different users and to increase the understanding of OTO's programs and ways for the public to engage in planning processes.
- Measure participation in public engagement efforts like surveys to ensure the public involvement is representative of the region or study area.
- Expand the utilization of the OTO Equity Index to understand the demographics of affected communities within the OTO that have disproportionate numbers of transportation disadvantaged or vulnerable populations with the intent of tailoring outreach efforts to include them in the planning process.

## Summary

Several years of performance measures used to evaluate the PPP have been compiled and now include data for the 2023 calendar year. The performance measures produce data for understanding how the public are utilizing tools that the OTO provides for keeping them informed and the methods that the OTO employs to solicit public engagement. A summary of conclusions from the performance measures include:

- In 2023, 86 comments were logged compared to 255 in 2021. The decline in comments is mostly due to fewer studies underway in 2023.
- The OTO Website had the highest number of page views in the period from 2015 to 2023 using Google analytics.



- The OTO sent out 13 press releases in 2023, resulting in 12 news articles which represents a 92% rate comparing releases to news articles. This is the highest rate since the tracking began in 2012.
- The number of followers on the OTO Facebook and Twitter account has increased during the past year. In 2023, the number of followers of the Ozarks Transportation Page has increased on Facebook and Twitter/X and currently is the highest since 2014. Facebook has proven to be a more effective platform to communicate with the public. The OTO Technical Planning Committee and Board of Director meetings are broadcasted on Facebook live to conform with the Sunshine Law.

The OTO staff will continue to work toward increasing public awareness of its role in the region and planning activities. The action items, especially maintaining email contacts for interested parties, should be effective in directly providing information and gathering public feedback from them. In addition, the public involvement processes outlined in the update of the PPP and implementation of the updated action items will provide continuity and consistency in public involvement efforts at the OTO.