

April 2019

Σ M B A R K



Public Engagement Plan

Introduction

The Public Engagement Plan (PEP) is a guide for the Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority (COTPA) doing business as EMBARK, to proactively initiate public involvement processes. The purpose of this PEP is to promote the use of effective methods to inform and provide meaningful opportunities for input by all members of the public on transportation decisions, as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations.

This plan is a living document which will evolve to help EMBARK deepen and sustain its work to engage all stakeholders in its service area. The plan allows the opportunity for the public to be involved in all phases of the public comment process by providing complete information, timely public notice, the opportunity for making a comment, and full access to crucial decisions. All comments are ultimately shared with the Board of Trustees for consideration before decision making.

Definition of Public Engagement

Public engagement is the process through which stakeholders' concerns, desires, and values are incorporated into the decision-making process related to services provided by EMBARK. Distinct from those processes carried out by staff or elected officials that result in administrative decisions, public engagement refers to methods that enable stakeholders to affect and/or influence a decision-making process directly.

Primarily consisting of the public, stakeholders can include a broad range of individuals and interests such as:

- Transit customers
- Individual or groups affected by a transportation project or action
- Individual or groups that believe they are affected by a transportation project or action
- Traditionally under-served and under-represented communities
- Residents of affected geographic areas
- Government agencies
- Community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Public engagement is often described as a continuum with many possible combinations of activities that include methods related to informing, listening to, and engaging stakeholders. These activities typically culminate in the development of agreements and/or expectations related to decision outcomes.

Regulations

EMBARC functions under a wide variety of federal, state, and local requirements. The list below provides an overview of the basic laws, regulations, and regional policies EMBARK operates within.

Federal Requirements:

- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Executive Order 13166 -- Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency
- Executive Order 12898 -- Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

State of Oklahoma Requirements:

- Open Meetings Act
- Open Records Act
- Other Requirements

Goals & Guiding Principles

The PEP endeavors to offer meaningful opportunities for the public, including low income, minority, and limited English proficient populations, to be involved in the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts of proposed transportation decisions by EMBARK.

Specific goals and outcomes include:

- **Quality Input and Participation**
Comments received are useful, relevant and constructive, contributing to better plans, projects, programs, strategies, and decisions.
- **Consistent Commitment**
EMBARC strives to communicate regularly and develop trust with communities while helping build community capacity to provide public input.
- **Diversity**
Participants represent a range of social, economic, ethnic, and cultural perspectives, with representative participants including residents from low-income neighborhoods, ethnic communities, and residents with limited English proficiency (LEP), and other traditionally underserved people.
- **Accessibility**
Every effort is made to ensure that opportunities to participate are physically, geographically, temporally (time of day), and linguistically accessible.

- **Relevance**
Issues should be framed clearly and simply such that the significance and potential effect may be understood by the greatest number of participants.
- **Participant Satisfaction**
EMBARC should encourage the public to participate in project or initiative related discussions, recognizing that people who take the time to participate feel it is worth the effort to join the discussion and provide feedback.
- **Clarity in Potential for Influence**
The process should identify and communicate where and how participants can have influence and direct impact on decision making.
- **Partnerships**
EMBARC develops and maintains partnerships with communities and community-based organizations through the activities described in this Public Engagement Plan.
- **Opportunities to Build Trust & Compromise**
EMBARC should ensure that discussions, mainly where there are conflicting views, are structured to allow for levels of compromise and consensus that will satisfy the most significant number of community concerns and objectives. EMBARC recognizes that processes which will enable for consensus to be achieved are critical to enable public support for recommended actions.

Guiding Principles

Effective public participation should be based on the following principles:

- **Flexible:** The engagement process should accommodate involvement in a variety of ways and be adjusted as needed.
- **Inclusive:** EMBARC should proactively notify and engage low income, minority, and LEP populations from its service area to encourage participation from all stakeholders.
- **Respectful:** All feedback received should be given careful and respectful consideration.
- **Tailored:** EMBARC's public participation methods should be adapted to match local and cultural preferences as much as possible.
- **Proactive & Timely:** Participation methods should allow for early involvement and be ongoing and dynamic so participants can influence EMBARC's decisions.

- **Clear, Focused and Understandable:** Participation methods should have a clear purpose and use for the input, and should be described in language that is easy to understand.
- **Trustworthy:** Information provided should be accurate and trustworthy.
- **Responsive:** EMBARK should strive to respond and incorporate appropriate public comments into transportation decisions.
- **Transparent in Impact:** EMBARK should communicate the results of the public’s input in terms of the impact on decisions at a broad summary level, providing the major themes, the conclusions reached and rationale for the decisions.
- **Authentic & Meaningful:** EMBARK should support public participation as a dynamic and meaningful activity that requires teamwork and commitment at all levels of the organization.

Identification of Stakeholders

Stakeholders are those who are either directly or indirectly affected by an outreach effort, system or service change plan or recommendations of that plan. Stakeholders include:

Board of Trustees –The governing body for trust, their role is to establish policy and direction for EMBARK. Three members serve by position – the Mayor of Oklahoma City, the City Manager and the City Finance Director – and five trustees are appointed by the Mayor and approved by City Council. One of the five members must live outside the city limits of Oklahoma City. In accordance with the inter-local operating agreement between the Trust and the City, the Administrator of EMBARK is appointed by the City Manager and approved by the Board of Trustees.

The Board defines the organization’s mission, establishes goals and expectations, approves service plans, sets fares, and approves the budget to accomplish the goals. The 8-member Board of Trustees meets on the first Friday of each month in the City Council Chambers. Board meetings allow for communication among the trustees, administrator, staff, and residents.

Transit Customers

- EMBARK Bus – Fixed-Route and Commuter services
- EMBARK Plus – ADA paratransit services
- EMBARK Vanpool
- Ferry Transit Services – Oklahoma River Cruises
- Bike Share – Spokies
- OKC Streetcar

- Other transit services provided or sponsored by EMBARK

Other audiences include:

- Minority Populations
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Customers
- Low-Income Customers
- Residents
- Students
- Local Jurisdictions
- Private Businesses or Organizations
- Employers
- Partner Agencies
- Government Stakeholders

Public Engagement Approach

EMBARK’s PEP allows the opportunity for the public to be involved in all phases of the public comment process by providing complete information, timely public notice, the opportunity for making a comment, and full access to key decisions.

Outreach Efforts

EMBARK takes pride in its work to maintain a collaborative relationship with the community and its stakeholders. EMBARK’s public outreach effort rests on utilizing multiple communication channels to distribute information to, and solicit input from, affected constituencies. EMBARK typically communicates with the public and its customers through one or more of the following methods.

1. Types of Outreach

- Public Comment – is used when EMBARK has developed a new policy, regulation, or procedure, and public input is sought. Topics are open for public comment for at least 30 days.
- Open House/Forum – is used when no set agenda or presentation takes place. Participants engage with informal exhibits and staff. Opinions, comments, and preferences are encouraged may be provided orally or in writing to staff.
- Workshop – is used to inform and solicit input on a particular policy, issue, plan, or project. Materials and agenda are prepared and posted in advance. No formal action is taken at a workshop.
- Community Meeting – is used to inform and or seek input on a specific topic. Community meetings are conducted by staff or a facilitator. Materials and agenda are prepared and posted in advance. Decision-

making officials may or may not be present.

- Public Hearings – is used to formally inform and or seek input on a specific topic. Staff or a facilitator conducts community meetings. Materials and agenda are prepared and posted in advance. Decision-making officials are present and decisions may be rendered at the conclusion of the hearing.
- Committee Meeting – is used to inform and or seek input on a specific topic. Community meetings are conducted by staff. Materials and agenda are prepared and posted in advance. Decision-making officials may be present.
- Board Meeting – is used to conduct official Trust business. Senior staff members present reports and answer questions concerning programs. All board meetings include a time for the public to comment. Only board members participate in voting. Materials and agenda are prepared and posted in advance.

2. Meeting Times, Locations, and Accessibility

All of EMBARK’s formal outreach meetings are conducted in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities and to people who rely on public transit. Formal outreach meetings will be an open format, held at various times and locations throughout the service area to maximize attendance.

3. Public Notices

Legal public notices will be published for any of the above formal outreach efforts where public input can impact decisions being made about the stated subject.

Public notices will be promoted at least 7 calendar days and not more than 14 calendar days in advance of set dates for: Public comment periods, Open houses or Forums, Workshops, and Community Meetings.

Legal notices for Board and Committee meetings will adhere to the requirements as outlined in the Oklahoma Open Meetings Act.

Legal notices for Public Hearings will adhere to timelines established in EMBARK’s Major Change Policy.

Public notices will be:

- published in a newspaper of general circulation and relevance to impacted audiences within the EMBARK service area when possible. The official advertisement will be published as a display advertisement in the non-legal section of the appropriate news outlet;
- posted on EMBARK’s social media channels and website relevant to the mode impacted;

- o posted at the Transit Center and onboard vehicle (s) of the affected mode.

4. Communication Methods

a. Website

EMBARC maintains a comprehensive parent website for all of its family of services – embarkok.com. This site is updated regularly and is home to bus route and schedule information, bus stop listings, system maps, other transit options, disability, and accessibility information, as well information pertinent to projects, plans and outreach efforts. The site also includes a Title VI and ADA page aimed at educating the public about our Title VI and ADA programs. Additionally, public notices of all EMBARK public meetings, public hearings, community meetings, open houses, workshops, and public comment periods are posted on this site. Some programs and projects may have dedicated landing pages (or micro-sites) that include information about upcoming meetings, fact sheets, and projects and plans. Embarkok.com includes the ability for users to translate pages into 90 different languages using Google Translate.

b. Customer Comments

There are multiple ways that individuals can provide verbal or written comments about any subject to us. Comment Cards are supplied at all community meetings, open houses, workshops, public hearings, and public meetings. The EMBARK website has multiple mechanisms to receive comments including a comment form, an email button that automatically begins an email to the Agency, comment forms on project pages, mailing address, and the Customer Service phone number where staff will take comments over the phone. Written public comments can also be submitted to staff at the Customer Relations window at the Downtown Transit Center located at 420 NW 5 St.

c. Social Media:

EMBARC’s Facebook and Twitter pages, and EMBARK’s website provide two-way communication with customers to deliver messaging and information regularly. EMBARK has social media pages and websites for its family of services. They include:

| | Bus | Streetcar | Ferry | Bike Share |
|------------------|--------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Website | embarkok.com | okcstreetcar.com | okriverscruises.com | spokiesokc.com |
| Facebook | @embarkok | @okcstreetcar | @okriverscruises | @spokiesokc |
| Twitter | @embarkok | @okcstreetcar | @okriverscruises | @spokiesokc |
| Instagram | @embarkokc | @okcstreetcar | @okriverscruises | @spokiesokc |
| LinkedIn | @embarkok | - | - | - |
| Nextdoor | @embarkok | - | - | - |

- d. Customer Relations
 - Customer Relations Window at Transit Center
 - (405) 235-RIDE (7433)
 - TTY 711
- e. Paid Advertisements

To promote its services or collect public comments, EMBARK may place paid advertisements in local printed or online publications or websites. Advertisements will be in publications most appropriate for reaching the impacted audiences. Print publications may include The Oklahoman, OK Gazette, Black Chronical, El Nacional, and Dan Quyen.
- f. Focus Groups

At times, the complexity of a project, controversial issues, or the reality of having multiple large Title VI groups to address may require engaging targeted audiences of stakeholders.
- g. Printed Materials

EMBARC produces publications as needed such route and schedule book, maps, brochures, rack cards, and posters, and makes them available to anyone. These publications include technical and policy information and often use visualization techniques to enhance understanding of transit planning and use. Materials are translated into other languages, as needed. All publications are available free of charge.
- h. Community Events

Occasionally, EMBARK will participate in community events and public gathering spaces to raise awareness of our services and/or promote ridership.
- i. News Releases & Media Relations

EMBARC distributes news releases as appropriate on events and other important information to news media. Press releases are posted on embarkok.com. Also, EMBARK's Public Information Officer(s) (PIO) is available to speak with reporters regarding various topics.
- j. Direct Mail, Emails, and Canvassing

EMBARC regularly provides information about its services through direct mailings, emails, and neighborhood canvassing to targeted households.
- k. Surveys

EMBARC may conduct surveys in print, by phone, in-person, and or online to collect public opinion on specific topics or issues. Depending on the

data being collected, EMBARK considers the methodologies that provide statistically valid data when possible. Surveys are available in English and Spanish, to increase the response rate from low income, minority, and LEP populations.

5. Visualization

EMBARK uses visualization techniques such as maps, charts, graphs, illustrations, presentations and videos at all types of meetings, including board meetings, to explain concepts behind actions and decision-making. EMBARK may also use handouts and posters to display visual information. EMBARK’s boardroom is equipped with computers, projectors, and sound systems for displaying visual and audio information. EMBARK uses style guides for data presentation and PowerPoint presentations to present a consistent, streamlined, and easy to understand the visual message.

6. Strategies for Engaging Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

EMBARK will take reasonable steps to ensure that LEP persons receive the language assistance services necessary by translating “vital” written materials.

Vital documents are defined either as:

1. any document that is critical for obtaining services and benefits, and/or
2. any document that is required by law. The “vital” nature of a document depends on the importance of the information or service involved, mainly the consequence to the LEP person if the information is neither accurate nor timely.

The designation of a document as “vital” may not mean that a word-for-word translation of that document will be required. In some cases, a vital document may be translated by providing a summary of the critical information in the document. In other cases, notice of the availability of language assistance services may be sufficient.

a. Language Translation Services

EMBARK staff will work to identify the specific language services that community members may expect to be provided. When EMBARK is hosting public meetings in a particular geographic area with a known, significant LEP population, the following should be done:

- a. Meeting notices should be produced and distributed according to the language translation threshold identified in the EMBARK LEP Plan, encouraging community members to participate. Also, participants can request interpreter services 48 hours in advance of the meeting, if needed; and
- b. EMBARK will provide at least one qualified interpreter at these meetings who are fluent in the designated LEP language(s).

b. Print Advertisements

- c. One-on-One Assistance through Outreach Efforts
- d. Website Information with Google Translate option
- e. Direct Mail

Response to Public Input

All public comments are provided to the Board of Trustees before decision making. A summary report is compiled, as well as the availability of all individual comments either in electronic form or hard copy. Summary reports are also posted on the EMBARK website.

Conclusion

EMBARK understands the importance of reaching under-represented populations, both as part of its commitment to being a valued community partner and in recognition of the significant proportion of its customer base which is included in these populations. It is necessary to establish procedures that allow for, encourage, solicit and monitor participation of all stakeholders in the EMBARK service area to ensure proactive public involvement in the planning process. The goal of this public engagement plan is to have significant and ongoing public involvement, by all identified audiences, in the public participation process for major agency outreach efforts.