



## Project Number

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# Use of Communication Technologies to Enhance Public Involvement in Transportation Projects

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### Current Situation

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) actively informs and solicits feedback from the general public regarding transportation projects. This communication process is especially important in early stages of planning and development as it helps to determine community needs and desires and reduces the risks of costly project delays. To ensure that all points of view are considered, participation by people from all backgrounds is required, including older populations, minorities, low-income households, people with disabilities, and people with limited English-speaking skills.

### Research Objectives

Florida International University researchers studied how new communication channels, primarily Internet based, could increase public participation in transportation decision-making process.

### Project Activities

The researchers considered the range of new communication channels and how they might be used. They divided the channels into three areas of use: **dissemination** of information; facilitating two-way remote **communication**; and assisting **participation** at public meetings. For each of these, they identified several channels, such as blogs, emails, and text messages (dissemination); video conferencing, social media, and online surveys (communication); and mapping applications and audiovisual media (participation).

The researchers compiled information about how states are currently using computer- and Internet-based tools by reviewing public involvement manuals from fifteen states, including Florida. The researchers found that new communication channels were commonly used in other states, though not all channels were used in all states. Many states recognized that new communication channels might reach different audiences at different rates, and traditional methods of engaging the general public were still the foundation of communication practice in most states. The researchers paid particular attention to how agencies reach underserved populations, particularly minority populations or those that may have limitations of mobility, sight, hearing, or the ability to read English.

The researchers then conducted two surveys of the general public, a paper survey mailed to 4,000 addresses and surveys taken of attendees at public meetings. Survey results were used to understand different population groups' communications preferences. The survey asked respondents about their familiarity with various communications channels, if they used them and how often, and how likely they were to access them, among other questions. Using survey results with information collected through the previous project tasks, the researchers developed guidance for the use of new communication channels.

### Project Benefits

Increasing public participation in the decision-making process for transportation projects helps assure that those projects will serve the needs and improve the transportation mobility of as many members of the general public as possible.

*For more information, please see [www.fdot.gov/research/](http://www.fdot.gov/research/).*



*Engaging the general public in planning helps assure that projects will meet the needs of people in many situations.*