

# Public Engagement Plan

Last Updated  
October 2023



## EASTERN FREDERICK COUNTY TRANSPORTATION STUDY

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## Eastern Frederick County Transportation Study Draft Public Engagement Plan (PEP) Last Updated 10-27-23

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Project Description

Frederick County is studying transportation issues and viable solutions for the project area situated to the east of the City of Winchester. The goal of the study is to develop a well-defined and documented set of transportation needs and implementable transportation improvements.

The study area includes Interstate 81 (I-81) in the west to the Frederick County/Clarke County line in the east; and extends from Route 761 on the north side of the city to the Tasker Road area east of the I-81 Exit 310.

The study will analyze transportation issues related to the road network and conceptually develop viable transportation solutions for the area through data collection and interviews. A map of the project area is provided in **Figure 1**.

#### 1.2 Plan Purpose

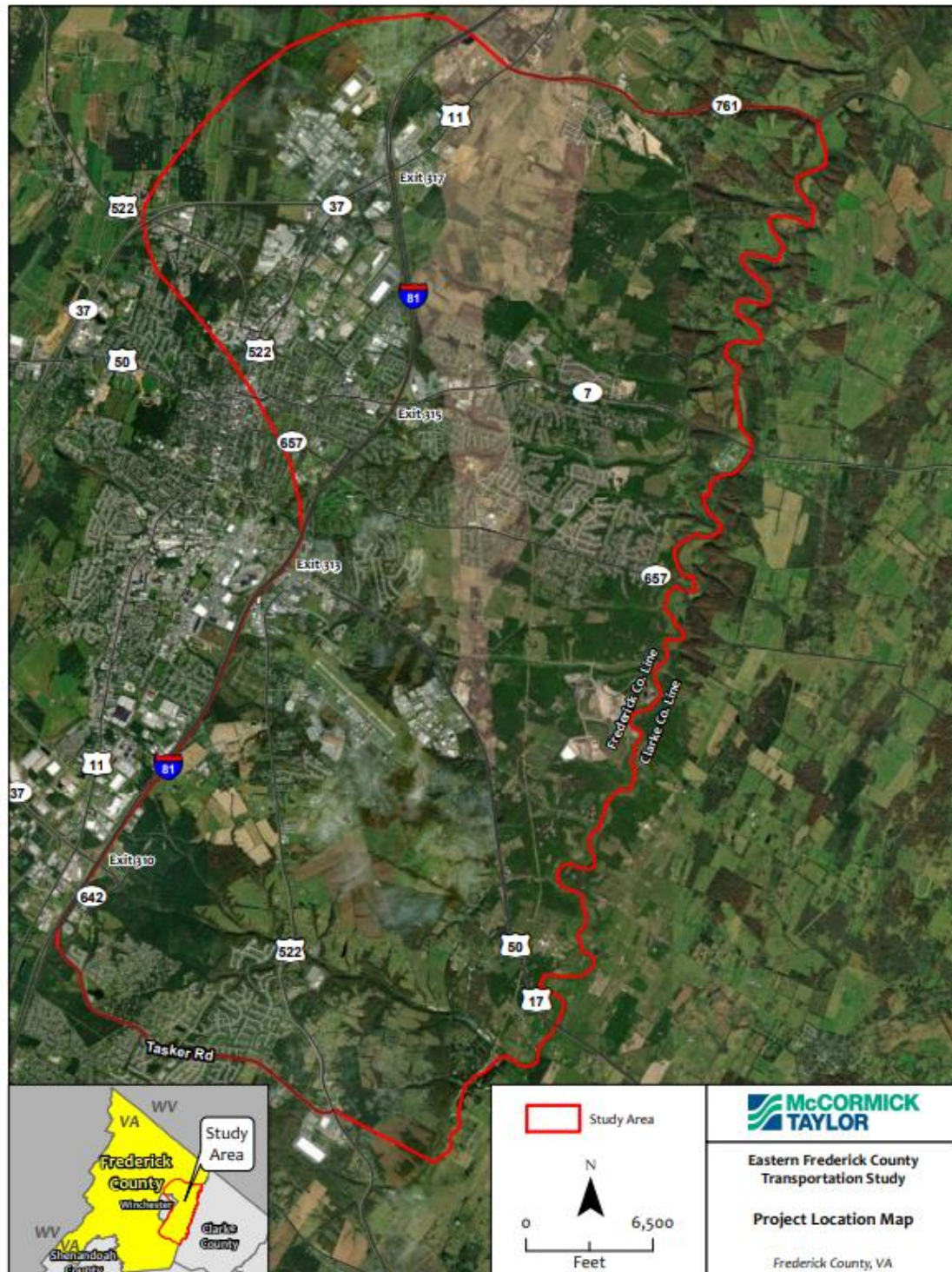
As part of the project development process, Frederick County will communicate regularly with the public, project stakeholders, and public officials and the media, as appropriate, and provide opportunities for project-related input and feedback. The Public Engagement Plan (PEP) outlines a comprehensive, proactive outreach strategy to be implemented during the study. The overall goal of the PEP is to:

- Heighten public awareness and understanding of the project
- Identify and purposefully engage key stakeholders in the project development process
- Provide public access to current and accurate project information
- Deliver timely responses to public inquiries; and
- Assimilate public views, preferences, and support for project outcomes that enhance mobility, safety, and efficiency

### 2. REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Public participation in the transportation planning process has been a priority for federal, state, and local officials since the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991 and its successors, the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21); the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU); the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP 21); the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act in 2015; and continues to be maintained in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) which was signed by President Biden on November 15, 2021. The IIJA also requires agencies to prioritize investments in low-income, historically underserved, economically disadvantaged areas, including rural communities and tribal lands.

Figure 1: Project Area Map







The Eastern Frederick County Transportation Study PEP is comprised of strategies and activities designed to meet or exceed the guidance and directives prescribed in the IJJA, and the following:

- *The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA of 1969);*
- *Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended in 2016;*
- *Executive Order 12898 of February 11, 1994;*
- *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;*
- *Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990;*
- *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990; and*
- *Executive Order 14091 of February 16, 2023.*

Additionally, the overall framework and context of this PEP are consistent with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Public Involvement Manual, dated November 2021. The PEP follows the guidance in the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) document, *Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making*, dated October 2022, to reduce inequities and ensure communities have a voice in the transportation decision-making process.

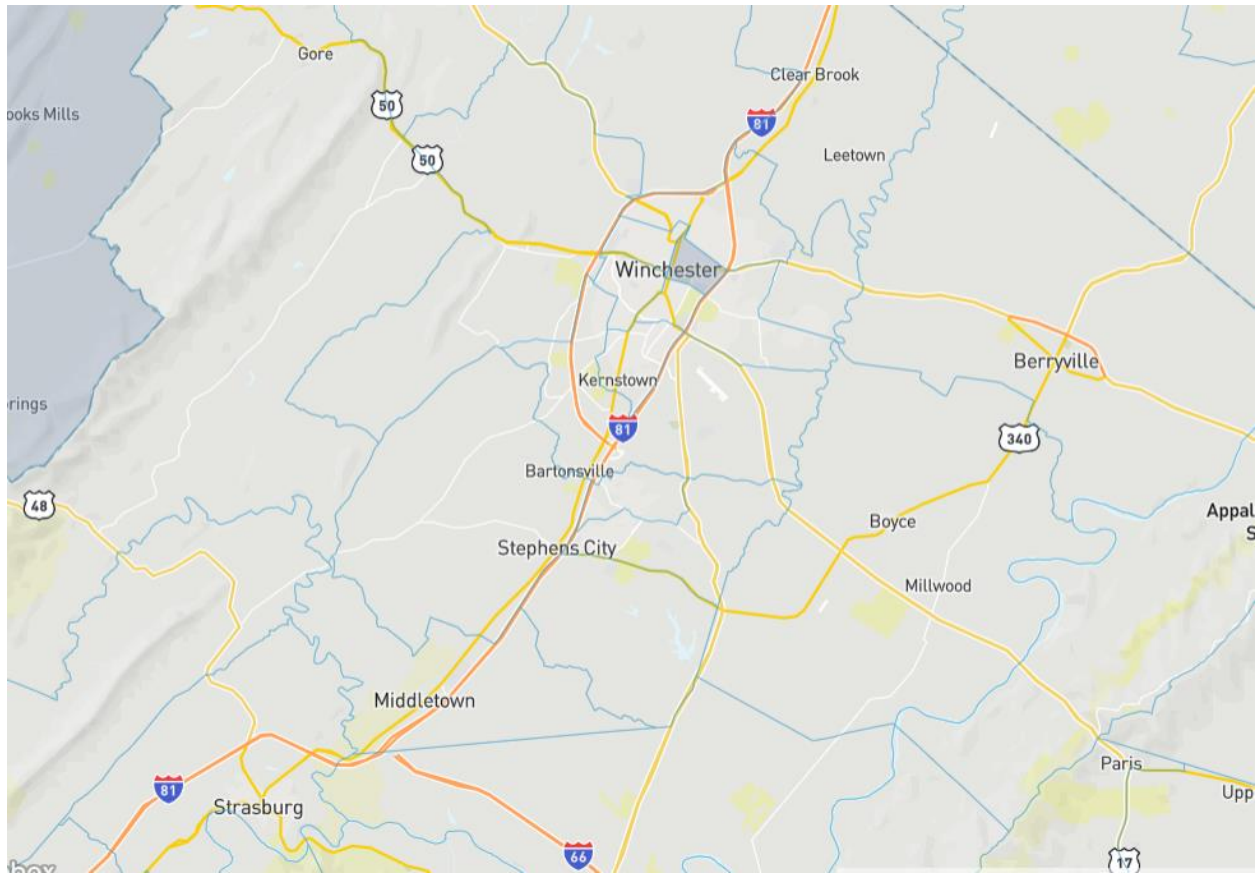
### 3. DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Beyond requirements to identify disadvantaged communities, it is important to analyze for these populations at the earliest possible time in project development because, historically, these groups have been left out of the planning and project development process. Early identification of disadvantaged communities can improve transportation for the entire community, as well as minimize or avoid potential harm from a project. Additionally, appropriate communication tools and outreach activities for these groups can be determined in advance.

In January of 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14008, which directed the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to develop the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool. The tool has an interactive map and uses datasets that are indicators of burdens in eight categories: climate change, energy, health, housing, legacy pollution, transportation, water and wastewater, and workforce development. The tool uses this information to identify communities that are experiencing these burdens. These are the communities that are disadvantaged because they are overburdened and underserved.

Within the study area, there are no United States (US) Census tracts that are considered disadvantaged. However, within Winchester City, adjacent to the Interstate 81 border, Census tract 51840000100 is considered to be disadvantaged (**Figure 2**).

**Figure 2: Disadvantaged Communities**



Source: Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool

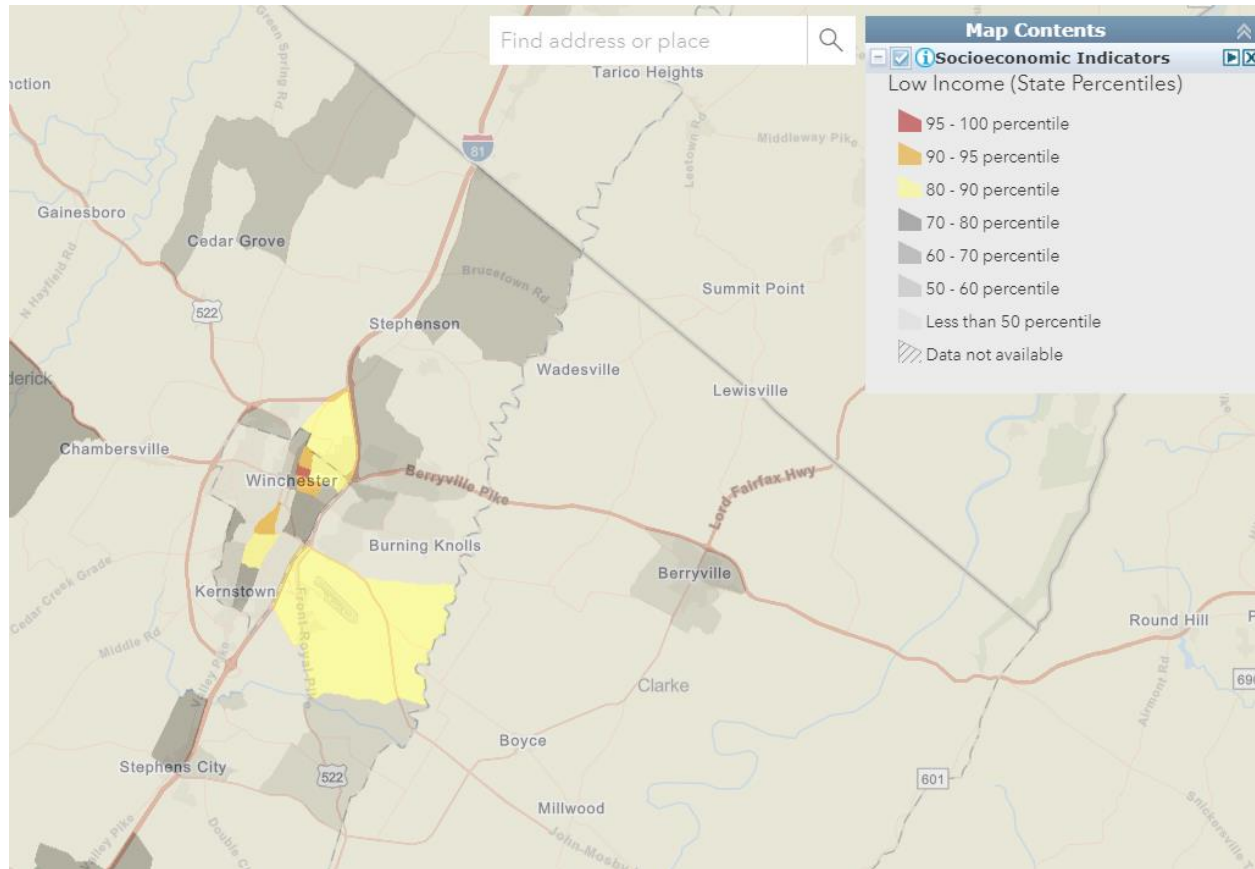
VDOT requires that all projects be evaluated using EJSCREEN. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed an Environmental Justice (EJ) mapping and screening tool, called Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool (EJSCREEN). It is based on nationally consistent data and is an approach that combines environmental and demographic indicators in maps and a standard report. EJSCREEN uses demographic factors as very general indicators of a community's potential susceptibility to environmental pollutants. The latest version (2019) of EJSCREEN uses the 2013-2017 ACS 5-year estimates summary file data.

EJ is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

EJSCREEN defines low-income as individuals whose ratio of household income to poverty level in the past 12 months was less than 2 (as a fraction of individuals for whom ratio was determined).

At the block group level, **Figure 3** compares the low-income population of the study area to the rest of the state. Within the study area, there is one block group that is in the 89<sup>th</sup> percentile. This means that 89% of the block group's population is low-income.

**Figure 3: Low-income Populations**



Source: EJSCEEN

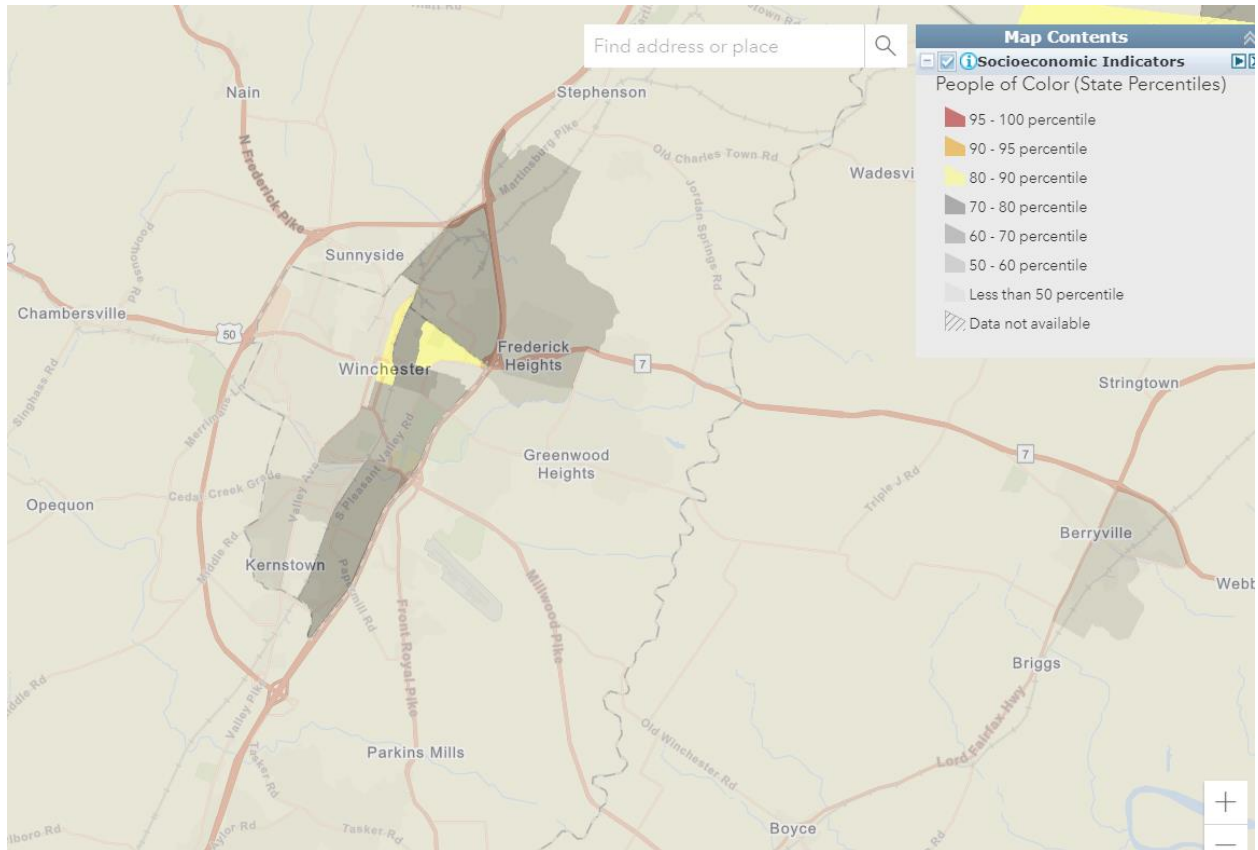
EJSCEEN defines people of color people as who list their racial status as a race other than white alone and/or list their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. That is, all people other than non-Hispanic white-alone individuals. The word "alone" in this case indicates that the person is of a single race, not multiracial.

**Figure 4** on the following page compares the population of people of color at the block group level to the rest of the state. Within the study area, there is one block group that is in the 69<sup>th</sup> percentile and one block group that is in the 51<sup>st</sup> percentile.

## 4. PEP APPROACH

The following PEP approach outlines the communication methods to be utilized by the McCormick Taylor project team. The components are well-defined but may be modified as the project progresses to be responsive to the needs of key stakeholders, impacted communities within the study area, public officials, and for the continued advancement of the project. The primary components include **project communications, project website, key stakeholder coordination, and public engagement**.

**Figure 4: People of Color**



The McCormick Taylor project team will implement, maintain, and update the PEP in collaboration with Frederick County over the course of this project. To ensure the quality of PEP materials, McCormick Taylor employs a corporatewide **Quality Control/Quality Assurance (QC/QA)** Process for the overall public involvement effort and materials generated by the McCormick Taylor project team.

## 4.1 Project Communications

### *Responding to Public Inquiries*

Effective and timely project communications are fundamental to a successful public involvement program. From responses to public inquiries to meeting invitations, it is critical that all project communications contain accurate information, reflect consistency with overall project messaging, and represent Frederick County in a professional and thoughtful manner. Accordingly, a protocol for processing and tracking public inquiries received via the project website, written correspondence, telephone, or other means will be developed for this project as directed by the County. The protocol may include establishing standard content to open and close responses, standardized replies to sensitive issues, and standardized copy lists so that key project team members consistently review and receive copies of all outgoing responses. The protocol also helps minimize, if not eliminate, the possibility of an untimely response or no response being provided.





## *Branding*

An easily identifiable project brand will be created to distinguish this study from other studies or projects completed for or associated with the Route 37 east bypass. This will foster public recognition of materials, communications, and other related public-facing communications resources. The branding will be utilized on the project website, meeting materials, reports, display boards, publications, and electronic communications, including social media, and is featured in this document design.

## *Social Media*

Social media helps expand project-related communications and engage traditionally underserved populations throughout the project area. Research has shown that social media is a highly effective tool to reach Latinos and African Americans; particularly via Facebook and Twitter, where representation is higher than average. Frederick County social media sites will be used to share important project information and events, including **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube**. McCormick Taylor will coordinate social media posts with the Frederick County Public Information Office. Social media campaigns are supported through the development of project-related graphics and content designed specifically for the identified platform. Content for use on social media is most effective when it includes attention-getting visual explanations and concise copy.

## *Mass Communications*

Project-related communications with the public are coordinated with Frederick County Project Manager and Public Information Office. Email blasts and 'e-bulletins' will be developed as requested by the County, and as the project progresses to keep the impacted community members and key stakeholders informed. This will help to further the public's comprehension of the project and foster an open and continuing dialogue regarding the project. Potential email topics include meeting announcements, project website updates, schedule updates, and other significant project developments.

## *Media Coordination*

All project-related communications with the media are to be coordinated with Frederick County Project Manager and Public Information Office. All media inquiries received by phone, electronically or in person are re-directed to the Public Information Officer. McCormick Taylor will develop news releases, media advisories and other project-related advertisements in draft format for review and comment by the Frederick County Project Manager and the Public Information Office. The final versions of the news releases, media advisories and other forms of project-related advertisements are to be placed or disseminated as directed by Frederick County Public Information Office.

## 4.2 Project Website/Web page

The consultant project team will consult with Frederick County to establish a project web-based resource on the County's website. McCormick Taylor will design and develop content for the website/web page. Additionally, two types of comprehensive content/graphic updates are planned for the project website/web page over the course of the project as follows:

- Updates associated with milestones and progress during the study (including materials/information about the two public meetings), and
- Updates after presenting the proposed alternatives.



## 4.3 Stakeholder Identification

McCormick Taylor and Frederick County worked together to develop a stakeholder database. It will be updated at least twice throughout this phase of the project and includes property and business owners, as well as local officials within the study area. The database serves as a stakeholder list to be utilized for information-sharing.

Fifteen stakeholders were identified for interviews as part of the Community Context Audit. The purpose of the Community Context Audit was to solicit a sampling of local interests, concerns, and perceptions about transportation within the study area. The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2023 and will allow the project team to proactively cultivate relationships with stakeholders, establish points of contact with local organizations and within the business communities, and establish reliable lines of communication to share project updates.

The stakeholder list will be updated regularly as the project development progresses.

## 4.4 Public Engagement

### *Public Meetings*

Two public meetings will be held to engage, educate, and inform the public. The first meeting will be scheduled for Fall 2023 (November Transportation Forum) and will present the updated draft purpose and need statement for the project based on the consultant team analyses. A second public meeting will be held in Spring 2024 for the presentation of the proposed alternative concepts to carry forward for more detailed evaluation, analysis, and design.

If a meeting space is not available in the County Office, the project team will select a meeting venue that is accessible to all people in the community. Participants will be able to access the meeting in-person or online on the County website following the in-person session.

Traditional media and public meeting promotion often does not always reach disadvantaged and environmental justice communities. McCormick Taylor will identify methods to inform these groups of the public meetings as directed by the County.

In coordination with Frederick County, McCormick Taylor will prepare advertisements, social media posts, invitations, handouts, presentations, graphic displays, comment forms, sign-in sheets, nametags, and other material needed for the meetings as appropriate. Following the public meeting, meeting materials will be posted on the County website unless otherwise directed by the County.

A summary for each meeting will be prepared and will include documentation of notifications, materials, attendance, and follow-up actions for project documentation.

## 5. AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that individuals with disabilities be provided equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from public services, programs, and activities provided by all state and local governments. In conjunction with the implementation of this PEP, Frederick County and the consultant project team have considered the needs of individuals with disabilities. In addition to seeking out those individuals who are often under-represented in this process, Frederick County and the



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consultant project team are committed to encouraging the involvement of individuals with disabilities to gain their invaluable perspective on the attitudes and needs of a vital component of the community for whom the transportation project is being implemented.

To accommodate individuals with hearing, speech, vision or mobility limitations, accessibility and/or auxiliary aids or services needed for communications and participation in project-related public events are made available upon requests received at least 48 hours before the date of the scheduled event. Public meetings are also held in facilities that are accessible to individuals with physical disabilities. All public notices and advertisements for public meetings will include Frederick County contact information for individuals needing special assistance due to a physical disability to participate.

## 6. QUALITY CONTROL/QUALITY ASSURANCE

All materials developed by McCormick Taylor and our sub consultant team members are subject to McCormick Taylor's Quality Control/Quality Assurance Process (QC/QA). The QC/ QA Process ensures that our project deliverables are technically accurate, appropriate, complete, satisfy the expectations of Frederick County, and meet the project needs.

All draft and final versions of project-related materials designed for public consumption will undergo an internal quality control review before delivery to Frederick County. Final versions of public engagement materials will also include a quality assurance review prior to delivery to Frederick County.

## 7. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE

The timeline of public engagement activities shown below in **Figure 5** is based on the current overall project schedule and is subject to change. The schedule is updated as needed to reflect changes in the program's components and/or the progress of the project development process.

**Figure 5: Public Involvement Activities Schedule**

