

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN



**REGION
CENTRAL**

Prepared for:
GBNRTC

In partnership with:
Stantec

May 5, 2021

Prepared by:
Highland Planning

Table of Contents

page

3

Engagement Overview

page

10

*Public Engagement
Activities*

page

16

*Public Engagement
Timeline*

page

18

Communications Plan

page

24

Contact Us

Engagement Overview

*Decision Statement and
Scope of Engagement*

Study Area

Stakeholders

*Pre-Engagement
Interviews*

*Key Takeaways from Pre-
Engagement Interviews*

Decision Statement and Scope of Engagement

Working with our neighbors to envision our shared future, by Spring 2022 GBNRTC will adopt a plan that shapes the future of mobility in Region Central, strengthens our communities, and creates a safer and more equitable and prosperous city and region.

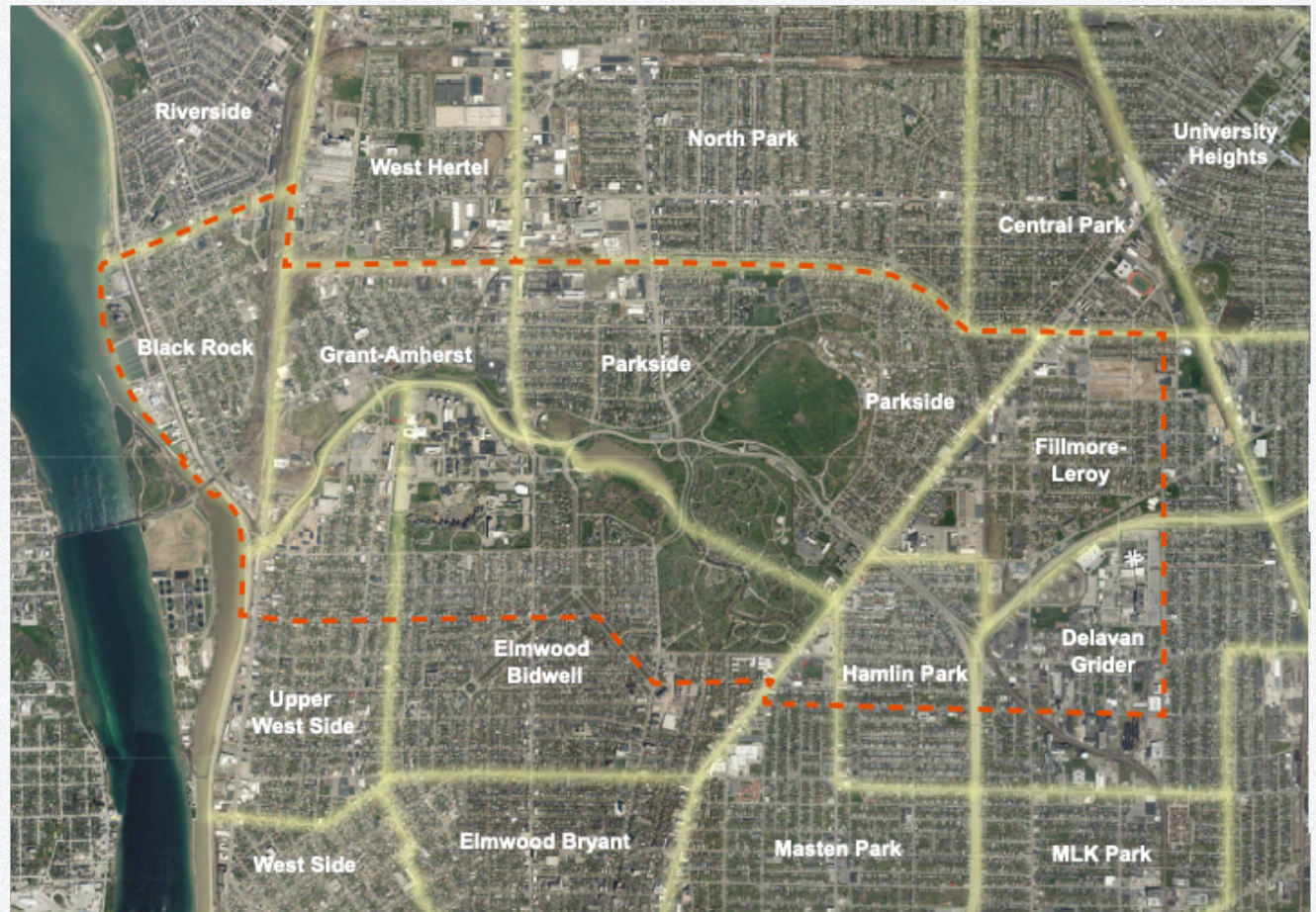
GBNRTC is seeking input on the local and regional context for planning in the Region Central area including:

- Needs and goals of area neighborhoods*
- Issues and opportunities related to economic and community development, housing, equity, environmental quality, and education in the area*
- Ideas for restoration and renewal of waterways and the Olmsted Park system legacy*
- Plans for growth and development of area educational and cultural institutions*

GBNRTC will use this input to develop a comprehensive vision for Region Central and identify mobility improvements related to roadways (speed and traffic calming, design, safety, integration with surrounding areas), bike and pedestrian facilities, transit, and smart technology.

Study Area

Region Central is the area centrally located within the Buffalo-Niagara Region, comprising Delaware Park, Buffalo State College, Forest Lawn Cemetery, and numerous cultural institutions. Buffalo neighborhoods in this area include Black Rock, Delavan Grider, Elmwood Bidwell, Fillmore-Leroy, Grant-Amherst, Hamlin Park, Masten Park, Parkside, and Upper West Side.



Stakeholders

Highland Planning has developed a database of organizations and contacts that includes key stakeholders from across the Region Central area and beyond. Major categories of stakeholders include:

- *Government agencies*
- *Cultural institutions*
- *Advocacy groups*
- *Neighborhoods*
- *Civic organizations*
- *Developers*
- *Residential complexes*
- *Educational institutions*
- *Faith-based institutions*
- *Medical institutions*

Pre-Engagement Interviews

Highland Planning conducted pre-engagement interviews with the following key stakeholders:

- *Laura Barnum, Buffalo State College*
- *Bradley Bethel, Restore Our Community Coalition*
- *Dan Castle, Erie County*
- *Brian Dold, Buffalo Olmsted Park Conservancy*
- *Norah Fletchall, Buffalo Zoo*
- *Charley Fisher, Trinidad Neighborhood Association*

Key Takeaways from Pre-Engagement Interviews

Focus conversation on higher-level issues and common ground. Past efforts have gotten stuck in the weeds or started from each stakeholders' preferred outcome instead of building a common vision from the ground up.

Try novel and innovative engagement techniques to get the community excited about the planning process. Go beyond formal public hearings and restrictive comment periods to engage the public where they are and listen deeply.

Build education into the engagement process but do not show up with a solution already in mind. Any shared vision for Region Central will involve trade-offs and having stakeholders step outside of their own perspective. The engagement process should be informative without pushing one solution or vision onto participants.

Include voices who haven't been heard before. Equity is essential to a successful engagement process. Not all communities are equally equipped to organize and respond to projects, so the outreach process should be as inclusive as possible.

A positive outcome will couple short-term actions with a long-term vision. While the purpose of the project is to build a long-term vision, including action items that can be accomplished more quickly will help sustain momentum and give participants assurance that their input is being heard.

Capitalize on overlap with other projects in the area. The Buffalo Zoo and Olmsted Parks Conservancy are developing Master Plans and Buffalo State College is working on a vision for a redeveloped Dart Street parcel. Synergies between these projects and others can help create a shared vision for the region.

Members of the community outside of Region Central should be included in the process. Most visitors to Region Central's cultural institutions come from outside the immediate area. Given the economic benefits these visitors bring, any plan should account for ensuring their return to Region Central.

Public Engagement Risk Assessment

Public outrage can hinder the forward movement of any project. Assessing the risk of public opposition and outrage and developing strategies to mitigate that risk is critical to avoiding

- Harm to a project's schedule, budget or overall viability
- Harm to the relationship between the decision-maker and stakeholders
- Harm to the decision-maker's reputation

Given the long planning history of the Scajaquada Corridor and its surrounding neighborhoods, it is our assessment that some risk of public opposition and/or outrage in response to the Region Central project does exist.

[Read the full risk assessment here.](#)

Risk Factor	Mitigation Strategies
Perception of Inequity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritize outreach to typically underrepresented communities.• Supplement online materials and outreach with in-person engagement.• Vet the process with a core group of stakeholders.
Planning Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define the decision and the opportunity for influence.• Emphasize the project's uniquely comprehensive and visionary nature.• Make engagement enjoyable.
Emergence of a Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare clear messaging points.• Identify a crisis communications point person.
Unclear Project Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a clear decision statement.• Define a clear scope of engagement.

Public Engagement Activities

*Public Engagement
Strategy*

*Build the Vision, April –
June 2021*

*Refine the Vision, July –
October 2021*

*Draft Mobility Plan, Nov
2021 – January 2022*

*Final Mobility Plan,
February 2022*

Public Engagement Strategy

Within and around Region Central, hundreds of stakeholders will undoubtedly wish to be involved in the planning process. We recognize that not all of these organizations and groups have the same roles, responsibilities, and capacity to participate.

We have designed our approach to accommodate these differences, considering the information needs, resource availability, level of influence, and stake in the project of various groups.

Our public involvement strategy focuses engagement resources on ensuring a comprehensive, inclusive, and equitable opportunity for stakeholders to participate in the planning process. Events and meetings in areas of the region that have traditionally had less access to planning processes are prioritized, while multiple opportunities remain for everyone to be involved in regionwide meetings, online forums, and small groups.

Engagement Activities

Build the Vision April – June 2021



Deep-Dive Interviews (April)

The project team will conduct up to **40 phone interviews** with key stakeholders to identify elements of a shared vision (e.g., concepts, goals, opportunities, constraints)



Interactive Website (May)

The **project website** will feature an “idea wall” to get input on elements of the vision.



Public Meeting (June)

The project team will hold a **public meeting** to get input on elements of the vision.



Stakeholder Advisory Group (May – June)

The project team will invite key **stakeholders** to a series of **meetings**:

1. Orientation meeting (virtual)
2. Test elements of vision statement (virtual meeting)
3. Draft vision (in-person meeting)
4. SAG subgroup: Design survey and outreach events (virtual meeting)

Engagement Activities

Refine the Vision July – October 2021



Interactive Website (Ongoing)

The [project website](#) will feature interactive elements including a survey, prioritization exercises, comment fields, and/or a virtual event.



Survey (July – August)

We will conduct an [online survey](#) to get public feedback on the shared vision developed by the SAG and the project team.



Outreach Events (July – August)

We will conduct in-person [outreach events and workshops](#) in various neighborhoods within the study area to educate the public about the project and get feedback on the shared vision.



Stakeholder Advisory Group (September)

The **SAG** will meet to finalize the vision and give input on options for future mobility.



Public Webinar (October)

The project team will hold a [webinar](#) to review the shared vision with the public and get input on possible ways forward.

Engagement Activities

Draft Mobility Plan

November 2021 – January 2022



Interactive Website (Ongoing)

The [project website](#) will continue to provide project updates and accept comments on the process.



Stakeholder Focus Groups (November)

The project team will conduct up to **4 focus groups** to inform specific recommendations for the mobility plan.



Stakeholder Advisory Group (November – December)

The **SAG** will hold two meetings:

1. Give input on options for draft mobility plan (November)
2. Review draft mobility plan (December)



Webinar (January)

The project team will hold a [public meeting](#) (virtual) to vet draft recommendations.

Engagement Activities

Final Mobility Plan February 2022



Stakeholder Advisory Group (January)

The **SAG** will meet to hear and give feedback on final plan recommendations.

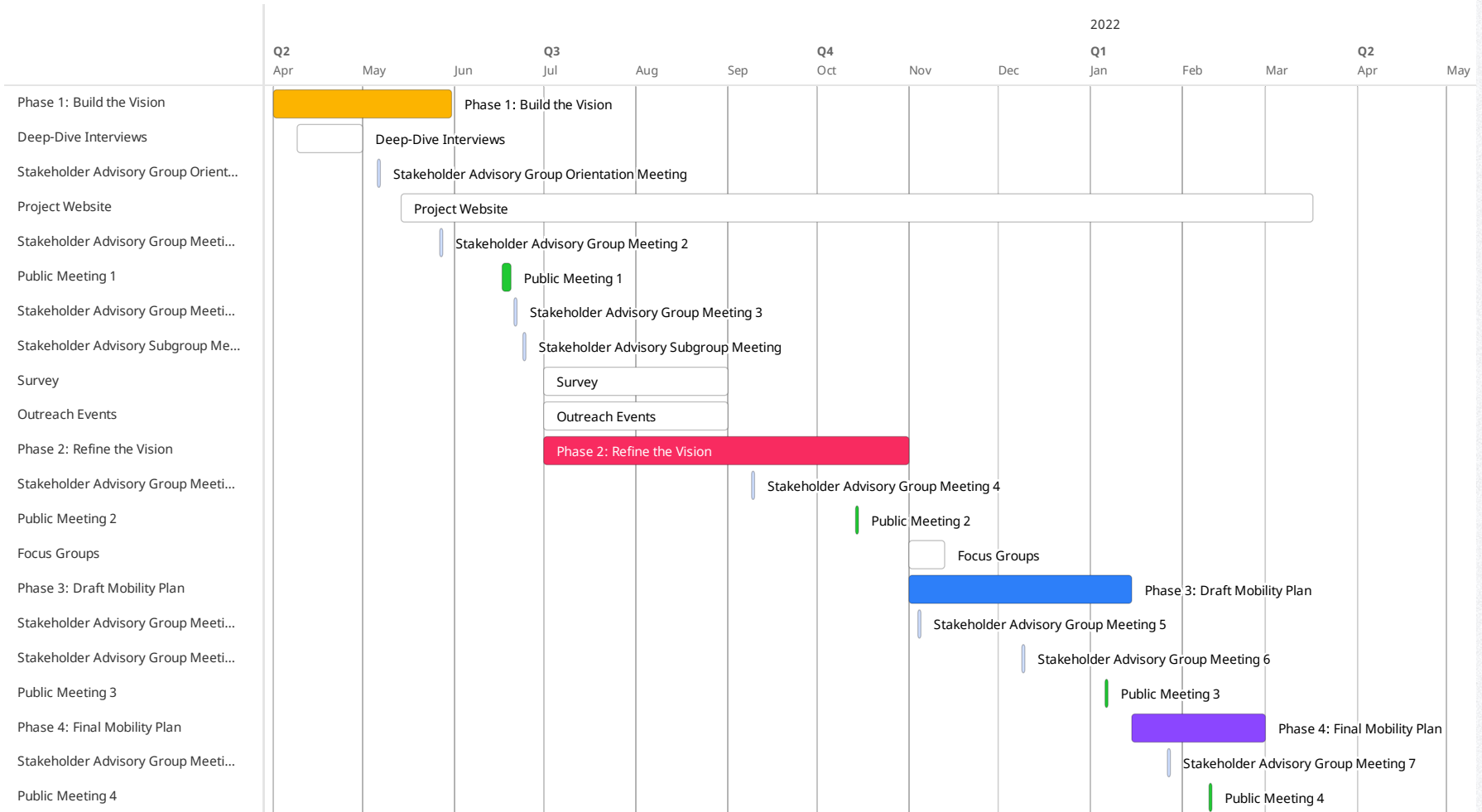


Public Meeting (February)

The project team will hold a **public meeting** to present the final plan to the public.

Public Engagement Timeline

Public Engagement Timeline



Communications Plan

Communications Goal

Audience and Messaging

Strategies and Tactics

Communications Goal

A strong communications plan can help ensure the effectiveness of public engagement efforts by building awareness of the planning process and its goals and encouraging participation in outreach activities. It can also serve to build relationships with stakeholders who share the goal of spreading the word about the planning process and opportunities for public input. The communications plan outlined here stresses a proactive approach to engaging the public by continually sharing information about the planning process to the media, the public, and partner organizations.

Communications Goal

Support an inclusive, effective engagement process by generating awareness of and participation in the Region Central planning process

Audience and Messaging

Promise	Safe, healthy, equitable, and accessible mobility options for Region Central that respect the corridor's natural features and history		
Target Audience	Residents and users of Region Central neighborhoods, parks, roadways, institutions		
Decision Statement	Working with our neighbors to envision our shared future, by Spring 2022 GBNRTC will adopt a plan that shapes the future of mobility in Region Central, strengthens our communities, respects our natural and historic legacy, and creates a safer, more equitable, more environmentally responsible, and more prosperous city and region.		
Tone of Voice	Trustworthy, Positive, Non-Jargony		
Elevator Speech	The Region Central planning effort takes a comprehensive look at the area's economic, housing, mobility, and social needs in order to envision a future transportation system that allows people to move around the area safely, efficiently, economically, and equitably.		
Messaging Pillars	Inclusive	Comprehensive	Visionary
Headline Benefits	Creating a better future for all who live, work, play, and travel in Region Central	Eliminating patchwork planning	Prioritizing people over cars
Supporting Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boundaries of study area and engagement extend beyond Rt 198 corridor Enhanced engagement activities specifically for underrepresented neighborhoods Intentionally diverse stakeholder advisory group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looks at the region as a whole, not just the highway Takes into account existing plans from around the study area Includes analysis of housing, land use, economic development, and mobility needs and opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins with crafting a shared vision Options and recommendations support the vision Intentionally future-oriented, considering regional needs over the next 50-100 years

Communications Strategy and Tactics: Overview

Our overall approach to communications for Region Central is to be proactive in explaining the project and the outreach process, encouraging public input, and establishing an open and inclusive environment for discussion.

Our strategies include ongoing communication with media outlets across the region as well as direct outreach to organizations, citizens, elected officials, and affected agencies. We also plan to work with partner organizations with extensive mailing lists to broaden the reach of our communications.

An interactive web presence managed by GBNRTC will allow interested stakeholders to access relevant project news, sign up for project alerts, and offer comments. Print materials will support outreach events described in the public engagement section of this plan.

Strategies and Tactics



Media Relations

- Highland Planning will produce and distribute press releases as needed at key milestone of the project
- At key milestones in the project, GBNRTC (along with partner organizations as appropriate) will visit with media outlets and reporters in forums such as
 - Radio show appearances
 - Project area tours/drive-throughs
 - Editorial Board meetings
 - TV morning shows
 - Op eds



Direct Outreach

- To support direct outreach to stakeholders, our initial focus will be on building a mailing list of interested organizations and individuals
- To ensure frequent interaction and timely project updates, we will create and send a monthly eNewsletter to elected officials, partner agencies, and the public
- GBNRTC will maintain ongoing communications via conference call with high-influence officials and agencies



Website and Social Media

GBNRTC, with support from Highland Planning, will develop and host a [website](#) that supports interactive public engagement. This may include posting relevant documents and meeting recordings, announcing meetings, allowing mailing list sign-ups and comments, and interactive exercises. GBNRTC will also post project updates to its own social media platforms.

Strategies and Tactics (cont'd)



Outreach Through Partners

As we produce materials related to the project, we will contact stakeholder organizations who could help us spread information to their own mailing lists. Types of information to be shared include:

- Social media posts
- Newsletter items
- Meeting/event announcements
- Website buttons

We will also explore the possibility of variable message signs on local roads and public service announcements in the transit system.



Print Materials

Print materials can support public engagement efforts, particularly pop-up events. We will design materials for production by GBNRTC as needed. These may include:

- Flyers
- Postcards
- Signage for pop-ups

Contact Us

Project Team

The Region Central public engagement and communications team includes:

Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council:

Hal Morse, hmorse@gbnrtc.org

Amy Weymouth, aweymouth@gbnrtc.org

JohnMichael Mulderig, jmulderig@gbnrtc.org

Highland Planning:

Nancy Raca, Project Manager, nancy@highland-planning.com

Stantec:

Jeff Sauser, Project Manager, jeff.sauser@stantec.com