



# **On the Move**

**2015-2045 Transportation Plan**

## **Wood County Public Forum on Transportation**

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# Wood County Public Forum on Transportation

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# INTRODUCTION

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014, students of POLS 6900 – Capstone Seminar in Public Administration at Bowling Green State University worked with TMACOG officials to host a public forum on countywide transportation needs to aid the project of crafting the TMACOG 2015-2045 Transportation Plan. The Public Forum was at the Holiday Inn Express in Bowling Green and took place between 6:30pm and 9:00pm. Fliers were distributed throughout Wood County with a primary focus in Bowling Green (See flier in Appendix A). Invitations were extended to, but not limited to, the following areas:

- Local government
- University personnel
- Student population
- Library postings
- Local business owners
- Postings in the Senior Center
- Chamber of Commerce

Attendees had an opportunity to review TMACOG displays and maps prior to the start of the forum to learn more about the current state of transportation in Wood County. Those in attendance were asked to sign in to track interest and participation. Forty-two citizens and community members worked together in six groups, an average of seven people each, to discuss community needs and possible solutions. Each group was facilitated by a student from the MPA program with a prepared set of topics and questions to help keep conversations flowing and on track. To ensure all aspects, thoughts, comments, and input were gathered each group had its own recorder as well. The recorder, also an MPA student took meticulous notes of conversations being had for analysis later. Each group had the opportunity to report out the main topics discussed at the end of the forum to identify potential commonalities and themes (a full agenda and topics for the evening can be found in Appendix B).

This report summarizes key findings of the forum and responses to a survey distributed to participants, and recommends several action steps TMACOG and stakeholders can take to enhance the transportation system in Bowling Green and Wood County. Multiple quotations are included throughout the report to demonstrate the community input that was gathered during the public forum.

## METHODOLOGY

As was previously mentioned, each group discussion had a recorder taking notes on the conversations occurring. These notes were later transcribed by members of the MPA Capstone Seminar. The graduate students took time to then review the notes and identify main topics, suggestions, and areas of interest or concern. To formulate the Key Findings of this report, all synthesized group notes were reviewed together to ascertain common themes amongst groups. These shared similarities were then used to report public interests, concerns, recommendations and input.

Another method of gathering data through this Public Forum was through an evaluation distributed to each attendee. The evaluations sought to measure participant interest as well as to ensure those in attendance had the opportunity to discuss the topics they were expecting to or hoping to (copy of the survey can be found in the Appendices). Key findings from the recorded group discussions and gathered surveys culminated in the recommendations of this report.

# FORUM DISCUSSION KEY FINDINGS

The transportation goals cited by forum participants mirror TMACOG’s preexisting goals for the 2015-2045 Transportation Plan. TMACOG has described its main goals for the Plan as follows:

1. **Safety:** Reduce traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries across all modes.
2. **Infrastructure condition:** Maintain and improve the transportation system to a state of good repair.
3. **Congestion reduction:** Reduce congestion on the National Highway System (NHS)
4. **System reliability:** Improve the efficiency of the surface transportation system.
5. **Freight movement:** Strengthen freight access to national and international trade markets to support economic development
6. **Environmental sustainability:** Protect and enhance the community and natural environments.
7. **Project delivery:** Expedite project delivery to maximize effective use of public funds.
8. **Personal mobility:** Improve the quality, accessibility, and efficiency of the multimodal personal transportation system.

With the exception of the fifth goal (freight movement), which was not a major goal identified by groups, each of these goals was identified as a major or secondary goal by participants in the public forum. Safety, infrastructure condition and personal mobility make up the core needs identified by forum participants. Notably, the eighth goal of personal mobility, was detailed by TMACOG to include an emphasis on bike paths and lanes, sidewalks, public transit, and passenger rail. Each of those was among the top three concerns identified by participants in the forum.

## *Finding 1: Greater transportation access for cyclists – particularly bicycle lanes*

During the forum, groups were asked to determine two issues they felt collectively were most important. Virtually all groups cited bicycle access as a top concern in Wood County. Half of the groups named bike lanes, bike paths, bike corridors, or general enhanced access for cyclists as one of those top two issues, with two of the groups naming it as their top issue. All but one group named bikes or general personal mobility, a broad category including bike infrastructure, as their top issue. All groups cited bike access as a concern. Bike access was also usually paired with access for pedestrians.

“People need to be more aware of bikes on the road.”

“There needs to be more access to bike transportation, but it’s not safe though. What about adding a bike lane downtown?”

Participants generally expressed beliefs that the creation of bike lanes and expansion of bike paths in Bowling Green and around Wood County was a community need, and one that is highly salient for citizens. Participants expressed a sense that personal mobility in the city and county is too dependent upon consistent access to an automobile, that current streets are hazardous to prospective cyclists, and that Bowling Green is overall “not bike-friendly.” Bike lanes in particular were seen as a means to provide citizens with an alternative transportation option, address

safety concerns, attract prospective students to Bowling Green State University, better connect the city and the campus, and improve quality of life. Some participants, in addition to calling for bike lanes, suggested that lanes be adequately spaced and distanced from automobiles. Other options proposed included a University bike share program, addressing problems regarding “bike etiquette” along with improving driver awareness of cyclists, and establishing rural bike corridors along State Route 64.

## ***Finding 2: Significant community need for more pedestrian-friendly infrastructure***

This need, like that of greater bicycle access, was cited by virtually all groups. “Walkability” was a word often used in groups to describe the extent to which the city supports a lifestyle of active walking as a form of regular transportation. Several forum participants believed that Bowling Green and Wood County generally could be made more “pedestrian-friendly” to support that lifestyle. Obstacles to walkability in the city were identified as including the absence of sidewalks in some areas around town, the presence of damage or a state of disrepair to existing sidewalks, the absence of crosswalks at high-traffic intersections deemed to pose safety concerns, the impact of winter weather on sidewalks, the cost of sidewalk repair, and the dangers of crossing a highway (something that interestingly applied to citizens’ ability to make it to the public forum, which was across Interstate 75).

Participants offered a number of strategies to address these issues through the creation or improvement of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Ideas articulated included the creation of additional crosswalks, sidewalks, and four-way stop signs where needed; repair of sidewalks as appropriate; and the standardization of sidewalk widths. One prominent suggestion was to address concerns about walkability while enhancing street access for cyclists through the creation of multi-use pedestrian/bicycle corridors between Bowling Green and surrounding communities, such as Perrysburg, possibly along state routes or on bridges over the highway. Some participants also called for more work to fix potholes and the general condition of streets.

“Not having a car makes it very difficult to get around Bowling Green. This really affects low-income families.”

## ***Finding 3: Need for improved public transit***

Outside of bike- and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, the most commonly cited community need among groups was increased public transit with a focus on regional connectivity. Participants identified several challenges affecting the county due to the lack of a mass transit service. A top concern was the affordability of existing public transit. Existing taxi services were thought to be excessively costly, disproportionately affecting key demographic groups, such as students, people with disabilities, the elderly, and low-income citizens. These are often the same demographic groups that lack personal transportation, making their situations even more acutely burdensome. The one existing bus system, operated by the University, is not accessible to townspeople, and the B.G. Transit subsidized taxi service, something cited by some groups as desirable, especially for senior citizens. Another commonly articulated issue is that of access to other communities. Participants expressed a desire to see Bowling Green and Wood County connected to Toledo, Columbus, Detroit, Findlay, and other cities, as well as major airports, bus stations, and train stations. Passenger rail was a major theme for groups discussing city connectedness. Regional connectivity was also paired with a desire for intra-community connectivity. Participants desired increased connectivity between downtown Bowling Green and its university campus.

To address these concerns, participants suggested four main ideas: creating a public transit system with fixed routes and relatively low fare (possibly by coordinating with TARTA), planning for and investing in passenger rail, researching innovative and best practices in other communities (Kent in particular), and ensuring that rural communities, which are even more isolated regionally than suburban and urban communities, are accommodated. These action steps were considered to have good prospects for boosting regional and local development and quality of life.

***Finding 4: Secondary concerns included traffic congestion, project funding, and environmental impact and sustainability***

Three other concerns were raised by some groups, although they were not as salient as cyclist access, pedestrian access, or public transit. These concerns included traffic congestion, project funding, and environmental impact and sustainability. Participants reported that truck volume, in particular was a problem, especially at the corner of Main and Wooster Streets in Bowling Green, where trucks appear to be too large to safely occupy necessary spaces. The Interstate 75 widening project was thought to be exacerbating this congestion in Portage and surrounding areas. Rerouting truck traffic outside of urban areas to remove this problem was a possible suggestion. Some participants also expressed concerns about general automobile congestion in downtown Bowling Green at night, around Wooster Street entrances and exits during weekends and on academic breaks, and in city and university parking lots.

“Bowling Green and Wood County should look at what other areas of the state are doing in regards to public transit.”

Another secondary concern was project funding. Participants felt that several of the major suggestions voiced throughout the forum were exciting, positive changes for the community, and/or necessary to resolve existing transportation problems and improve quality of life. But they also felt that it would be a challenge to obtain funding for these projects, let alone sustain such funding over time. Finally, two groups cited the impact of transportation use on the environment, and the long-term environmental sustainability of our transportation

system as a major concern. Consistent with some groups’ explicitly expressed desire to shift away from an automobile-dependent transportation lifestyle, participants believed that Bowling Green and Wood County should do what they can to minimize potential harms to the natural environment.

***Finding 5: New attitudes are required to overcome challenges and embrace opportunities***

Some groups, going beyond practical, tangible community concerns, identified a more abstract, but equally as important, problem: there is a belief that the community is “stuck” in a particular mindset about transportation that reinforces existing negative practices, cannot see merit in making change to the status quo, and fails to take action to meaningfully address and solve community problems. Participants felt that the community is excessively dependent on automobiles, but that citizens will use alternative modes of transportation if they are made viable and more easily accessible, and that the community has held back from embracing these alternatives due to adhering to flawed assumptions of conventional thinking about feasibility and desirability of more transit. This mindset, participants affirmed, must change.

***Finding 6: Safety, personal mobility, connectivity, and quality of life are the most important values when evaluating transportation issues***

Discussions among and between participants during the forum were connected by at least four major values: safety, personal mobility, connectivity, and quality of life. Safety was perhaps the most salient of these, as participants expressed fears of cycling and walking in and around Bowling Green and Wood County, driving along

flooded rural streets, the seemingly routine tendency of drivers to flout traffic rules and norms, and other problems. Citizens, they affirmed, want to feel safe as they move about in the community. This feeds directly into the second value: personal mobility. Participants felt that their options are constrained with respect to transportation, that their community is excessively dependent upon ownership and/or use of automobiles to get to where they want to be, and that citizens should have viable alternatives that they can use in their everyday lives, such as bicycles, walking, and public transit.

Participants also felt that it is important for Bowling Green and Wood County to be connected to other communities. Notably, the two most frequently cited communities participants felt the area should be connected with – Toledo and Columbus – are also large urban centers with cultural diversity, amenities, and other attractions. Citizens want to be able to visit these places, and bring their experiences back home with them. Fundamentally, these three values help compose the fourth, and overarching value: quality of life. The feeling among participants at the forum was that quality of life would increase if Bowling Green and Wood County seized the opportunity to address identified needs and possible solutions.

## MEETING EVALUATION RESULTS

An evaluation form was given to forum participants as a way to gather input on the public meeting itself. This evaluation provided valuable feedback, and allowed for forum participants to shape future public meetings. Specific questions were asked about the location, information provided, group facilitators and discussion. A blank copy of this evaluation can be found in the appendix. With 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest score, the results of the evaluation were as follows:

- The location of the meeting: **4.04/5**
- The display materials: **4.21/5**
- The presentation: **4.17/5**
- Small group facilitator: **4.68/5**
- Discussion portion of the meeting: **4.68/5**
- Did we clearly explain the 2015-2045 Transportation Plan? **3.68/5**
- Did we clearly provide sufficient information to allow for your input? **4.04/5**

“The breakout session allowed for great group discussion!”

Respondents universally agreed that the public forum was worth their time.

Most respondents cited the small group discussions as the best aspects of the meeting. The good dialogue, civility and participation were particularly noted.

Respondents cited the small group facilitators and the discussion portion of the forum as especially well done parts of the forum.

The meeting location should be chosen so that people can have varied access to it (walk) by public transportation, not only by vehicles.”

No respondents rated any features of the public forum poorly (a score of 1 or 2), but there appeared to have been room for improvement.

Respondents had a number of suggestions for future events, including having more public forums, reaching out to BGSU students, looking at what other cities are doing, better location, longer discussion time, more of a narrow focus (bike lanes, public transit), larger room, and working with legislators and executives. One

respondent reported being intimidated by “all of the important people in the room.”

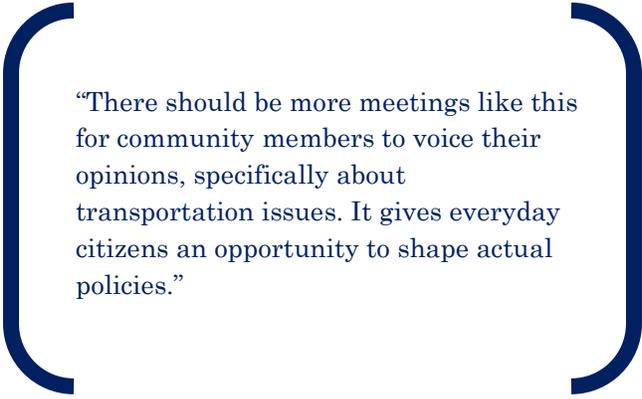
# RECOMMENDATIONS

## ***Ensure that Wood County is fully included in regional planning.***

Given the extremely close overlap between TMACOG’s goals and those expressed by forum participants, TMACOG should work closely to continue reaching out to the relevant local governments and civic organizations in and around Wood County.

## ***Hold more public meetings to engage and coordinate with stakeholders and educate the public.***

Many citizens, and even some policy makers, are unaware that there is a substantive, county-wide dialogue occurring about transportation needs and potential policy prescriptions in Wood County. Local governments could host meetings to continue the conversation with constituents, solicit input and ideas, research best practices, and raise awareness.



“There should be more meetings like this for community members to voice their opinions, specifically about transportation issues. It gives everyday citizens an opportunity to shape actual policies.”

## ***Take identified action steps for enhancing transportation in Wood County.***

Forum participants identified several substantive ways to diversify and enhance transportation options for citizens in Wood County, including the creation of bicycle lanes, expansion of bicycle paths, additional sidewalks and crosswalks; street and sidewalk repair; the formation of a public transit system establishing regional connectivity; and looking at passenger rail. TMACOG should work with city, town, village, and county leaders and policy entrepreneurs to perform feasibility and environmental impact studies, assess costs and benefits, secure and sustain project funding, and realize desired policy outcomes.

# APPENDICES

## *Public Meeting Marketing Flier*

HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF  
TRANSPORTATION IN  
WOOD COUNTY!

# On the Move

2015-2045 Transportation Plan

# PUBLIC MEETING

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24**

**Doors open at 6:30 p.m.**

**Meeting at 7 p.m.**

Holiday Inn Express

2150 E. Wooster Street, Bowling Green

### What is Transportation?

Sidewalks    Bicycling    Roads  
Buses   Cars   Ships   Trucks  
Trains   Airports

How does transportation affect  
the community and businesses?

**For more information,  
contact TMACOG,**

**419-241-9155**

**or visit**

**[www.tmacog.org](http://www.tmacog.org)**



**Sponsored by:**  
BGSU Master of Public Administration Program

**Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments**  
300 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Ste. 300, Toledo OH 43604



**Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments**

**2015-2045 Transportation Plan:**

In Coordination with the BGSU Master of Public Administration Program

**Public Forum Agenda and Topics**

Holiday Inn Express

Bowling Green, Ohio 43402

February 24, 2014

Thank you for participating in the 2015-2045 Transportation Planning process for the TMACOG (Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments)! Tonight's public forum is designed to gather public input about past, current, or future transportation implementation projects and ideas. Your input is critically valuable for this process and will have real world results.

**Public Forum Agenda:**

**6:30pm-7:00pm**

Display area is open

**7:00pm-7:15pm**

Welcome and Introductions

\*Diane Reamer-Evans, TMACOG

\*Maribeth Stevens, BGSU MPA

Graduate Student

**7:15pm-8:30pm**

Breakout sessions and group discussions

**8:30pm-9:00pm**

Wrap up and review of individual group dialogue main topics

**\*\*\*Special thank you to Grounds for Thought and Stimmel's Market for sponsoring refreshments at this evening's event!\*\*\***

**Discussion Topics**

Thank you for participating in TMACOG's Transportation Wood County Plan Public Forum! The purpose of this forum is to gain community insight regarding transportation in the Wood County region. Your input, perceptions, suggestions, and thoughts are vital to the forward progress of the 2015-2045 Transportation Plan. Throughout your discussions, please feel free to keep in mind the following topics and how they may impact your personal and professional lives:

- Safety
- Infrastructure condition
- Congestion reduction
- System reliability
- Freight movement
- Environmental sustainability
- Project delivery
- Personal mobility

Discussions are not limited to these subject matters, but instead may provide a framework for dialogue. Examples of local topics that may impact your day-to-day include:

- Bicycle lanes
- Sidewalks
- Public Transportation
- Highways and railways
- Regional airport

Input gathered from tonight's forum will be used to inform TMACOG's Planning Committee of the concerns and needs of the community. For more information regarding the 2015-2045 Transportation Plan, please feel free to contact TMACOG:

Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments  
300 Martin Luther King Jr. Dr., Suite 300  
Toledo, Ohio 43604  
(419) 241-9155

## Public Meeting Evaluation Summary



### WOOD COUNTY PUBLIC MEETING EVALUATION

Number of evaluations completed: 28

**On a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), the public meeting was ranked as follows:**

The location of the meeting: **4.04**  
The display materials: **4.21**  
The presentation: **4.17**  
Small group facilitator: **4.68**  
Discussion portion of the meeting: **4.68**  
Did we clearly explain the 2015-2045 Transportation Plan? **3.68**  
Did we clearly provide sufficient information to allow for your input? **4.04**

#### **Additional Comments:**

##### **Was this meeting worth your time?**

- Was a great opportunity in the small group format to express transportation concerns
- Yes
- Yes! Hope to receive summary report from TMACOG
- Hope to help transportation related improvements
- I think a bit more information would be helpful
- Yes, I particularly was interested in bicycling in BG and region
- Yes, good discussion with diverse group

##### **What went well during the event?**

- Great topics
- Good dialogue at our table
- Discussion in small groups
- Group discussion
- All discussed
- The breakout session allowed for great group discussion
- Discussed very valuable points about transportation
- Conversation
- Discussion, turn out
- Lots of time to think/share
- The discussions were smooth and respectful
- The discussion went well; the main point highlight was good as well
- Small group
- Everyone chimed in
- Networking/Information sharing
- Very good roundtable discussion
- The group discussions were great for everyone to get their input in

##### **What ideas/suggestions do you have for future events?**

- keep small group format; make more opportunities available in Wood County for the member communities here
- I like this format!
- I think it went well
- Nothing
- To discuss how we are going to pay for these improvements
- Please reach out to students at BGSU to provide feedback
- I was intimidated by all of the important people in the room
- Lobby Senators, legislators, and governor for attention; need state support
- Bike lanes
- Make more available for BGSU students
- Not sure yet
- Could get a few more examples of what other cities have done to inspire participants
- Downtown BG
- The meeting location should be chosen so that people can have varied access to it (walk) by public transportation, not only by vehicles
- Allow a little longer for discussion or have a more pointed focus (ie trucks, bikes, pedestrian transportation)
- Public transportation seems to be a hot topic
- Ideas for where to go next
- More focused/specific discussions of specific topics (ie Bicycling)
- Larger room, turn-out was good, so you need a larger room next time



**WOOD COUNTY MEETING EVALUATION**

Was the purpose of this meeting clearly explained: YES  
*(To provide a forum for community input)* NO

**We want to know what you think of this meeting.**  
*Please circle one choice, on a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)*

**How would you rate each of the following?**

-					
• The location of the meeting	1	2	3	4	5
• The display materials	1	2	3	4	5
• The presentation	1	2	3	4	5
• Small group facilitator	1	2	3	4	5
• Discussion portion of the meeting	1	2	3	4	5
<i>DID WE CLEARLY:</i>					
• Explain the 2015-2045 Transportation Plan?	1	2	3	4	5
• Provide sufficient information to allow for your input?	1	2	3	4	5

**Please share your comments:**

Was this meeting worth your time?

What went well during the event?

What ideas/suggestions do you have for future events?