

PACE I-290 Express Bus Feasibility Study

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT PLAN

February 2025



Introduction

In Pace's new strategic vision plan, Driving Innovation, which serves as the agency's framework directing the way transit projects, programs, services, infrastructure, and technologies are for the immediate and long-term future. Pace emphasizes supporting the express bus program including continued investment in Pace's emerging Rapid Transit Program of regional expressway and arterial-based highspeed, limited stop express services, corridor development, transit-supportive land use including station area development and pedestrian access. A core component of Pace's Driving Innovation is building a network of high-speed and convenient expressway-based bus services, known as Pace Express.

This Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP) will address the list of community influencers, the number and type of meetings, overall communication strategy, anticipated participation, community engagement plan and outreach goals to the express bus feasibility study for the Interstate 290 Eisenhower Expressway corridor.

The engagement strategy exemplifies Pace's commitment to equity in multiple ways. We will ensure inclusivity by offering multilingual outreach materials and, when necessary, providing translators at public events to resolve language barriers. Our efforts will also concentrate on outreach within traditionally marginalized or underrepresented communities, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives are acknowledged and addressed. Our digital engagement platforms will also prioritize accessibility, catering to diverse age brackets and technical skill levels.

Strategies

To support the express bus feasibility study for the PACE I-290 Eisenhower Expressway corridor, the SIP will include strategies that will:

- Educate and involve the community throughout the study and its outcomes. Aiming to ensure that those most impacted by the study in the project area are well-informed and actively engaged.
- Engage residents along the I-290 corridor through accessible, equitable, and respectful in-person and virtual outreach, ensuring that the voices of diverse community members are heard and incorporated into the decision-making process.
- Collaborate with elected officials, community-based organizations, and local municipalities to facilitate public engagement and ensure broad representation.
- Foster a culture of collaborative problem-solving by working closely with local leaders and communities in the surrounding areas, integrating feedback into the design and implementation of the results.

Stakeholder Groups

The project team will start our engagement efforts by emphasizing that we need to reach out to all communities in the study area. Our approach is centered around our commitment to equitable engagement as we focus the team's time and effort on reaching impacted communities who are usually left out of engagement. We will stay true to the data collection and stakeholder feedback throughout each phase of the work and unique engagement to ensure that we engage inclusively. At the core of our engagement, we will work to treat the public as experts of their community and ask them to participate in different engagement opportunities.

- **Community-based organizations**
 - Local CBOs that operate within or near the study area will have local knowledge of the neighborhoods and municipalities they serve. Community based organizations include social service, youth, senior services, and other non-profit groups. Partnerships will need to be formed with these organizations to ensure the project team is reaching every part of these communities. As many of these organizations are largely or exclusively volunteer run and have limited resources, extra care will need to be taken to be respectful and efficient when their time and capacity are requested.
- **Elected officials and Municipal Representatives**
 - The elected official and municipalities exercise various degrees of jurisdictional authority over the study area and most importantly close coordination will be required to make these projects successful. To develop and implement creative, equitable, and meaningful engagement that provides a well-defined and sustainable path to successful implementation, the project team will require the active participation and coordination with other government agencies, including municipalities; federal, state, and local agencies; county governments; and elected officials. They will also be able to share local knowledge of their constituents and will be crucial partners in ensuring all communities are reached.

- **Local business and agencies**

- Keeping local business and other stakeholders informed and engaged throughout the study will help to ensure their continued support. Many local amenities like libraries, hospitals, and educational facilities along both corridors are essential to the distribution of information. It will benefit these local businesses and agencies from the increased accessibility for both their employees and customers that Pace will bring and will need to be included in the engagement process to assure their cooperation and support.

Engagement Schedule

This 12-month engagement schedule starts January 2025, and ends December 2025. It will consist of in-person engagement which will occur in three different phases supplemented by ongoing focus groups, Steering Committee, and public meetings, with online updates. The three phases are **Understand, Engage,** and **Evaluate**. The overall project schedule is presented below. In addition to the listed focused strategies the engagement will be spilt into three phases as the study progresses:

2025											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Understand	Engage									Evaluate	
Steering Committee Meeting											
Public Meetings											
Focus Groups											
Online Updates											

Phase 1: Understand

During this phase, January-February 2025, the project team will work to establish an understanding of the process going forward with stakeholders. This may include one-on-one meetings with elected officials and regular check-in meetings with CTA, CDOT, and IDOT. The project team will host a steering committee meeting to provide an overview of the project, proposed improvements and anticipated schedule. The project team will also engage attendees in public outreach strategies and potential outreach strategies.

Phase 2: Engage

In the engage phase, March-November 2025, the project team will focus on increasing transparency and effective engagement for those along I-290 Expressway. As part of this phase, the project team will use different engagement tools and actions that adequately reach communities that are often overlooked. Two sets of three focus group meetings, all representing different groups, will take place in this phase along with three steering committee meetings and two public meetings. The team will coordinate with local organizations, steering committee members, and neighbors to maintain a presence at various places where we can meet the community where they are. This phase will end with an engagement summary to understand what people think about the existing conditions

Phase 3: Evaluate

During the evaluate phase, November-December 2025, the project team will prepare the public for what happens after the study is completed. The final phase of engagement will provide resources and strategies to keep steering committee members informed. The engagement summary will highlight how the team reached communities across different parts of the study area, feedback on proposed conditions and how the feedback was incorporated in the study.

Steering Committee

The success of the projects will require the participation and support of community leaders, agencies, and elected officials. Regular meetings will be held throughout the project to keep the steering committee members informed, engaged and supportive of the project.

Key municipal representatives, elected officials, service agencies, and community leaders will be gathered to form the steering committee. As champions of their respective communities, the steering committee members will provide leadership and expertise in effective communication and outreach with the public.

- **Objectives**
 - Provide technical guidance for the consultant team in defining the engagement needs, understanding the project phases, and understanding any challenges and opportunities in the study area.
 - Contribute to the implementation and communication of the engagement strategies and actions with assigned responsibilities and timeframes for completion of the project.
 - Coordinate and obtain input from their respective organizations.
- **Composition**
 - Consistent with our intent to provide an equitable approach, we will ensure that the steering committee represents the whole project area. The invited members of the group will be developed with Pace's team, but should include representatives from:
 - Municipalities and elected officials
 - Other transit agencies (Chicago Transit Authority and Metra)
 - Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (CCDOH)
 - Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT)

- Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)
- Organizations representing the project area underserved and underrepresented populations (i.e., may include social service providers, faith-based organization, or youth organizations)
- **Expectations**
 - The steering committee members will:
 - Attend and participate in up to 2 virtual meetings.
 - Suggest agenda items as needed.
 - Develop and prioritize engagement strategies and actions.
 - Share engagement opportunities through their communication channels and contact stakeholders to broaden participation.
 - The project team will:
 - Provide an overview of project scope, schedule, and objectives.
 - Set up and facilitate up to 3 one-hour virtual meetings over the course of the project and produce agendas, presentations and meeting notes.
 - Get input and comments on engagement strategies, actions, and performance measures,
 - Draft engagement project documents and distribute materials in advance of meetings.
 - Produce and share event summaries for each event.

Public Meetings

There will be two public meetings during the engage phase that will offer ways for the public to learn about project goals, updates, engagement strategies, and actions. The public meeting allows us to provide outreach in an equitable manner by partnering with organizations hosting other events will allow the project team to engage with more people than are typically reachable through traditional public meetings.

- **Goals**
 - Each meeting will engage people in 2 different public meetings at different locations in the study area. Our goal is to engage 30 attendees per meeting.
 - Our approach for the first public meeting to take place within the I-290 Corridor aims to educate people on Pace, and the intent and purpose of the study. While also learning about the attendees' lived experiences as they pertain to the corridor. Our meeting activities will include interactive engagement boards that include background context, understanding the area, mapping exercises, and specific community needs or concerns that should be addressed. We will also offer child-friendly activities, such as building blocks and coloring sheets, to encourage people of all ages and socioeconomic groups to participate. The meeting materials shared at the meeting will be uploaded online after the meeting.

- We will engage the community for our last public meeting, to provide final details during the evaluate phase while sharing how the input directly impacted the study. The last project public meeting mirrors the first with a presentation format.
- **Approach**
 - The team will collaborate with the steering committee to finalize the location of the public meetings. They should be in places where people feel comfortable and are reasonably accessible.
 - Event specific sign-in sheets will be created to keep track of participants and to grow the engagement network.
 - A digital toolkit with social media content will be produced for Pace, the steering committee, and community influencers to promote each event. A digital toolkit will also be shared with community members for them to promote within their networks.
 - The event materials will include boards, sign-in sheets, project overview one-pagers, and coloring sheets, that support the goals of educating the public on the projects and gathering feedback.
 - The materials will use easy-to-understand language with messaging that resonates with the community. Translation will be provided, if needed.
 - Media advisories will be sent to local media outlets to promote and enhance engagement activities.
- **Timeline**
 - Events will occur during engage and evaluate phases.
 - The media advisory will be sent one month in advance of each meeting.
 - The digital toolkit, email invitation language, boards, and any event-specific materials will be provided three weeks prior to each meeting
 - Event advertising that include social media posts, emails, newsletters, and media advisory will be sent at least two weeks prior to the meeting.
 - All meeting materials will be printed one week prior to the meeting.

Focus Groups

There will be six focus groups held, divided into two sets of three, to provide participants with opportunities to learn about project goals, updates, engagement strategies, and actions, as well as to share their input in a more intimate, small group setting. These focus groups allow us to gather targeted feedback in a way that meets participants where they are, focusing on an equitable outreach approach.

- **Goal**
 - The six focus groups will engage participants in 6 virtual sessions, with a target of 8-10 attendees per session. The goal is to gather detailed insights and experiences from a diverse range of community members.

- **Approach**
 - The team will collaborate with the steering committee to share focus group logistics.
 - The event materials may include virtual boards through Mentimeter and presentations that support the goals of understanding the public on the projects and gathering feedback.
 - The materials will use easy-to-understand language with messaging that resonates with the community. Translation will be provided, if needed.
- **Timeline**
 - Events will occur during phase 2.
 - The email invitation language, boards, and any event-specific materials will be provided three weeks prior to each meeting.
 - All meeting materials will be shared with participants one week prior to the meeting.

Assessment

To achieve the SIP objectives, each engagement event should summarize and validate the input the consultant and project teams received in prior phases of engagement and indicate ways and to what extent engagement may be changed. The draft engagement summary will be sent to Pace to review within one week after the event. The final engagement summary will depict community input over the two phases of engagement. The consultant team will also produce an engagement summary as an appendix of the report.

- **Public Comment Tracking**
 - Throughout the project, we will get public comment. Public comments may be received via mail, social media, public events, surveys, interactive map and through the project website. It is important to address public comments to ensure public opinions are recognized. The project team will track public comments and respond to them in a timely manner.
- **Public Meeting Documentation**
 - The consultant team will document all Pace activities and provide meeting minutes and summaries to Pace. The consultant team will thoroughly document all activities related to the Pace project, including the planning, coordination, and execution of the focus groups and other engagement efforts. This documentation will include detailed meeting minutes that capture key discussions, decisions, and feedback from participants.

Communications Strategy

The strategy we intend is to engage the public with the purpose of increasing visibility, community awareness, and gauge community sentiment and feasibility of a I-290/I-88 Express Bus Route. This strategy has been divided into two (2) key areas:

- Paid Media
- Earned Media

Paid Media

Paid media would pertain to content that would be paid to be distributed to our target audience by a third party. This includes direct mail, paid social media advertisements, and print/digital advertisements.

- Direct Mail
 - Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) or Direct Mail is a marketing strategy that involves sending physical promotional materials. In this project's case, the materials would be flyers and postcards, directly mailed to a targeted group of recipients chosen by Zip code. The targeted group would be residents and businesses located in proximity of the I-290 & I-88 corridors and their immediate connected area. The third party would then mail the materials to the selected recipients.
 - Rudd Resources recommends the use of Fidelity Print Communications to print and mail the postcards. This EDDM order specifically will be bundled, meaning documentation will be filled out and dropped off at the local USPS Post Office by Fidelity Print Communications. USPS will then deliver to the carrier routes selected. The number of routes can be adjusted to fit the desired need and budget.
- Paid Social Media Advertisement
 - Paid social media ads are ads that utilize social media platforms' algorithms and user data, to ensure content reaches the most relevant users, increasing visibility and engagement. For the I-290 Express Bus Feasibility Study, geographic-based ads can help increase awareness. By using paid social media ads, we can effectively drive the sharing of information to the public, identify points of interest and enhance community awareness on a wildly utilized resource.
 - Rudd Resources recommends the use of Meta for paid social media advertising. Meta uses an auction system to estimate ad costs, where advertisers bid for placements. Rudd Resources recommends setting a daily budget for the campaign. The auction system considers three key factors when determining ad placement:
 - Expected Engagement: This includes metrics like clicks or conversions.
 - Bid/Budget Amount: The daily budget allocation plays a significant role.
 - Audience Match: How well the ad aligns with the target audience.
- Some standout benefits to this system are:
 - Ads that score higher in relevance and engagement can gain placements at lower costs, even if their bids are lower than competitors. This means that while higher

bids can increase chances of visibility, the overall cost is influenced by the quality and effectiveness of the ads within the auction environment.

- The system provides flexibility, allowing for bid and budget adjustments in real-time based on performance insights. This helps refine the campaign for better results.

Digital/Pitch Media

In addition to print/digital advertising Rudd Resources would recommend sharing media pitches with the news publications. Media pitches would build on top of the print/digital media by adding an additional layer of publicity by targeting an audience that may not use print/digital media. It will also raise awareness by reaching targeted audiences already interested in the topic and enhancing credibility through reputable media coverage. Below are media outlets Rudd Resources recommends for media coverage:

The Daily Herald- Focuses on suburban Chicago, with coverage of DuPage County (including Oak Brook, Addison, and Downers Grove) and surrounding areas.

- Reporter Marni Pyke covered the increase in Pace buses in the Cook, DuPage and Lake counties last year.
 - [More Pace buses coming to Cook, DuPage and Lake](#)

Forest Park Review- A community-based newspaper focusing on Forest Park and surrounding neighborhoods in the western suburbs.

- Freelance Writer Igor Studenkov has previously covered the change in Pace bus policies in 2022.
 - [Pace proposes pulling plug on suspended suburban routes - Forest Park Review](#)

Downers Grove Suburban Life- Covers Downers Grove and other western suburbs, with a focus on local news and events.

- Writer Jessie Molloy covered the initial plea for an electric bus last summer in Plainfield.
 - [Underwood in Plainfield to present Pace with funding for electric express bus – Shaw Local](#)

Chicago Tribune- Covers Cook County and the greater Chicagoland area, including suburbs like Oak Brook, and Elmwood Park.

- Reporter Nara Schoenberg often covers the environmental impact of buses.

- o [Electric school buses take off in Illinois; over 200 on the road](#)

Shaw Local News Network is a group of community-focused newspapers and digital outlets serving suburban and rural Illinois, including parts of Cook and DuPage counties, with a focus on local news, events, and issues relevant to residents in those areas.

- Writer Scott Holland discussed the transforming transit changes previously.
- [Eye On Illinois: Fixing transit agency problems requires more than reforming status quo – Shaw Local](#)

Earned Media

Earned media is publicity gained through efforts such as social media shares, press mentions, search engine traffic, news article features, and word-of-mouth from in-person interactions. Earned media differs from paid media in that it is not purchased; instead, it is gained organically through actions, reputation, or compelling content that naturally attracts attention.

- Social Media
 - o Rudd Resources highly recommends the use of social media platforms to share information and spread awareness of the Study. Leveraging established social media platforms offers a cost-effective way to raise awareness about the I-290 Express Bus Feasibility Study within the affected community. Using Pace’s Facebook page, which already has a large, engaged following, allows Epstein to reach a broader audience without the time and effort required to build a new audience from scratch. This collaboration will enhance the visibility of the study while connecting residents with other organizations of interest.
 - o PACE’s social media platforms that Rudd Resources recommends utilizing are:
 - Facebook: 10,322 followers as of 1/27/2025
 - LinkedIn: 55,097 followers as of 1/27/2025
 - X (formerly Twitter): 3,675 followers as of 1/27/2025

Community Engagement

Rudd Resources believes in-person engagement is one of the most effective approaches, as it allows for word of mouth to thrive, creating authentic connections and amplifying reach. In-person outreach is a cost-effective method that relies more on time and effort than monetary investment. It can involve activities such as setting up informational tables at local community events, distributing flyers and printed materials, or initiating conversations using promotional items that highlight the key message or idea. The following in-person methods will be utilized to boost awareness:

- Focus Groups
- Public Meeting
- Steering Committee Meeting
- Interactive Website

- The website gives us an opportunity to showcase all facets of the project in a way that informs and inspires people to learn more about the study. We want to help people learn about the project in a way that allows them to provide immediate recommendations through an interactive map, survey, and direct contact as well as understand the holistic approach we will take by highlighting the various engagement activities. Most importantly, we want people to leave the website with knowledge of the importance of this project and ways they can get involved.
- Rudd Resources will measure the impact of the website through clicks to the site, input on the interactive survey, subscriptions for email updates, contact form usage, and QR codes/bit.ly links that we will create for our engagement activities.