

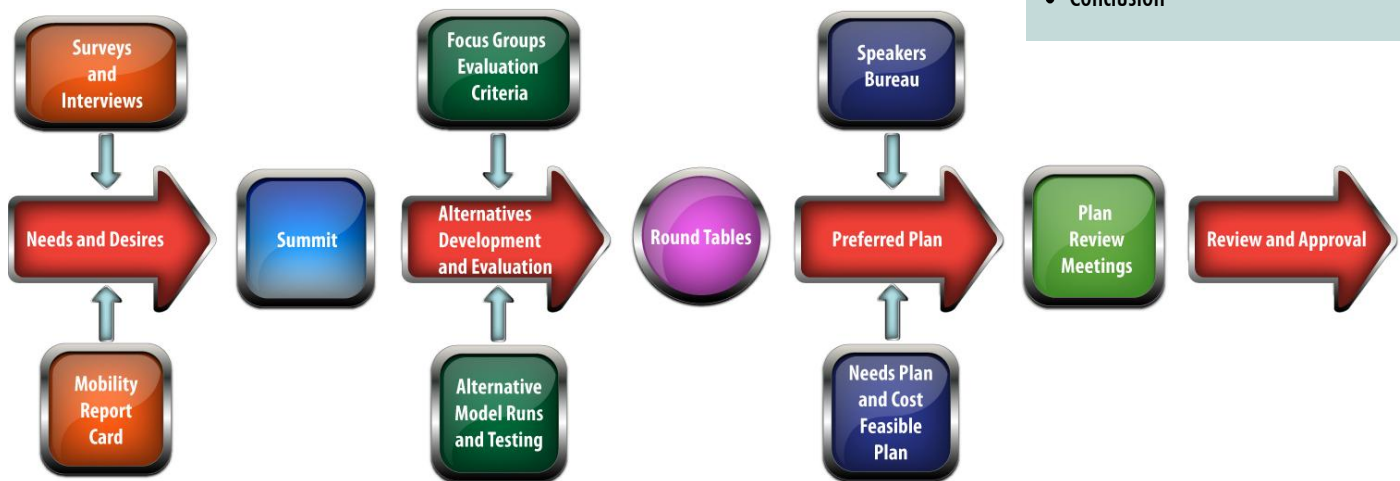
CHAPTER 3

OUTREACH AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The outreach effort sought meaningful public input from residents and businesses throughout the region. Activities included workshops where people could discuss future directions and transportation priorities as well as online surveys and staffed mall displays. Events were tailored to key decision phases in the planning process: defining needs and desires, developing and evaluation of alternatives, and creating a draft plan. The three phases are presented graphically in the following figure.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

- Plan Launch
- Decision Point 1 – Needs and Desires
- Decision Point 2 – Alternatives Development and Evaluation
- Decision Point 3 – Selection and Refinement of a Preferred Plan
- Conclusion



This chapter describes community engagement activities and how the public influenced the Plan’s development.

Plan Launch

Public outreach began with raising awareness of Connections 2040 and the opportunity to participate. Key activities included:

- Project Website Development and Launch
- Media Relations
- Community Networking

Updates continued throughout the planning process.

Website

The website, www.connections2040.com, was launched as a central source for distributing information about and gathering input for the Plan. The website provided background information, including informational videos, as well as up to date project progress. In addition, visitors could take the online surveys (see below), request information, and post comments. Links to Facebook and Twitter were also included to take advantage of ever-growing social networks.

Media Relations

Coverage of the Plan’s development spanned among the print, radio, and television media. Highlights included:

- Ongoing blogging at the Connections Visioning Forum and Future Scenarios Workshop by the Gazette newspaper;
- A guest opinion piece in the Gazette encouraging “millennials” to get involved in the Plan;
- Appearance of the Corridor MPO Chair on KGAN’s To The Point; and
- Interviews on drive time radio programs.



Community Networking

Networking helped spread the word about the Plan throughout the region. Networking involved contacting individuals and organizations to help publicize the Plan, mobilizing the Corridor MPO’s Metro-area Advisory Committee (a citizen advisory group) to distribute plan information, and sending email notifications.

Decision Point 1 – Needs and Desires

What We Did

The major public participation activities to assess needs and desires were:

- Residential and Business Online Surveys
- Connections Visioning Forums

These activities gave the community options for participating in the planning process. By completing online surveys, people could participate conveniently from their home or work place. At the Visioning Forums, people were able to learn others’ points of view and explore priorities together.

Residential and Business Online Surveys

More than 300 residents and businesses participated in online surveys between November 18, 2009 and January 8, 2010. Results from the surveys were used to understand views on current transportation conditions and identify key themes to address in the Plan.

Connections Visioning Forum

On December 3rd, 2009, two visioning forums, one in the afternoon and one in the evening at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown Cedar Rapids, approximately 40 persons attended the afternoon meeting and 30 people attended the evening event. Following introductory presentations, participants worked in small groups with maps and stickers representing land uses and transportation improvements to develop their visions for the region. The process began by allocating new development around the region to accommodate the 94,000 new residents projected for the region by 2040. The next step was to allocate approximately \$2 billion in funding for transportation to maintenance of existing facilities or improvements to roads, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities.



What We Learned

Online Survey

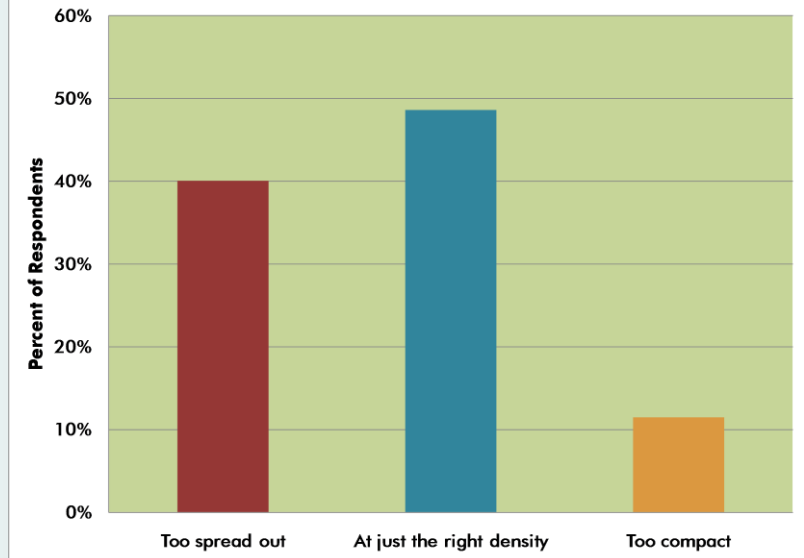
In the online survey, residents and business people evaluated the current transportation system and expressed priorities for future changes. Results between the two groups were similar. One exception was answering “Within the past 10 years, the quality of my community has gotten worse,” stayed the same or gotten better. While 47% of residents said their community had gotten worse and 25% said that it had gotten better, 33% of businesses felt their community had gotten worse and 42% said it had gotten better. The two groups also varied in their assessment of recent development. Of the 62 business responses, 48% said that recent development in the region has been at the right density, 12% said that it was too compact, and 40% said that it has been too spread out. Among the 230 residents responding to the survey, 45% said recent development has been too spread out, 37% said it was just right and 17% felt it has been too compact.

Survey respondents also addressed transportation funding, with 17 to 20% of residents and businesses expressing the belief that taxes should be increased significantly to pay for transportation improvements and 34 to 43% indicating support for increasing taxes moderately. Both groups expressed support for using tax dollars on more trails, on-street bike lanes and pedestrian facilities, and improved transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities.

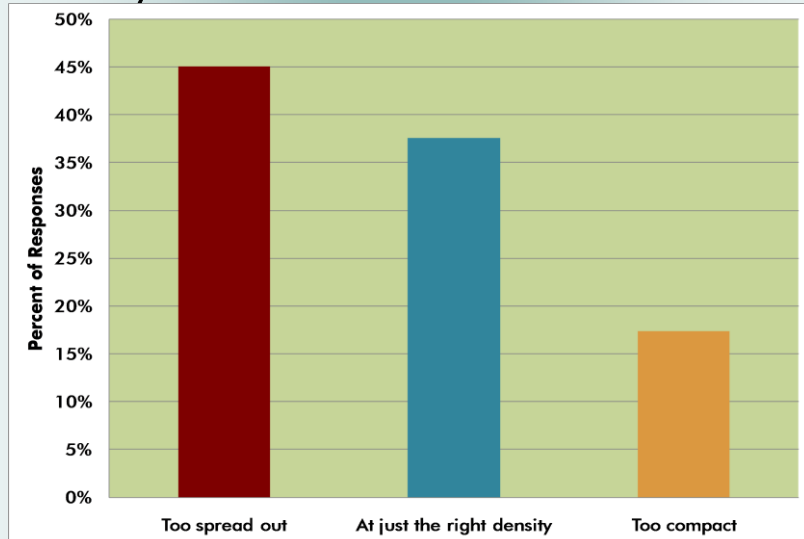
Survey Results

RECENT DEVELOPMENT in the region has been:

Business Survey Results



Resident Survey Results



Visioning Forum

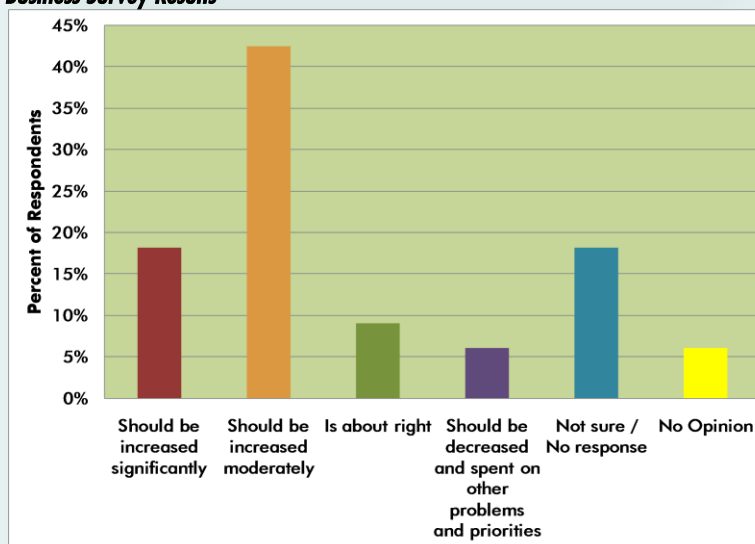
In the Visioning Forum, nine tables created future land use and transportation maps. Variations in how the different tables approached future growth and transportation priorities were used to create three future scenarios in the second step of the planning process. Key variations included:

- Density** – Some groups concentrated growth in mixed-use development while others dispersed growth in single-family development. This led to three scenarios ranging from the current trend of low density suburban development to more intensified infill and redevelopment.
- Transportation Modes** – The groups also varied in the emphasis they placed on different transportation modes. Some were heavily focused on providing easy travel, for automobiles and trucks while others reduced expenditures on roads and increased both transit and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Priority Improvements** - The future scenarios also reflected varied opinions on specific improvements. For instance, several tables included the extension of Iowa 100 between I-380 and US 30 as a two-lane or four-lane arterial, and none of the groups included it as an expressway. Three groups did not include an extension of Iowa 100.

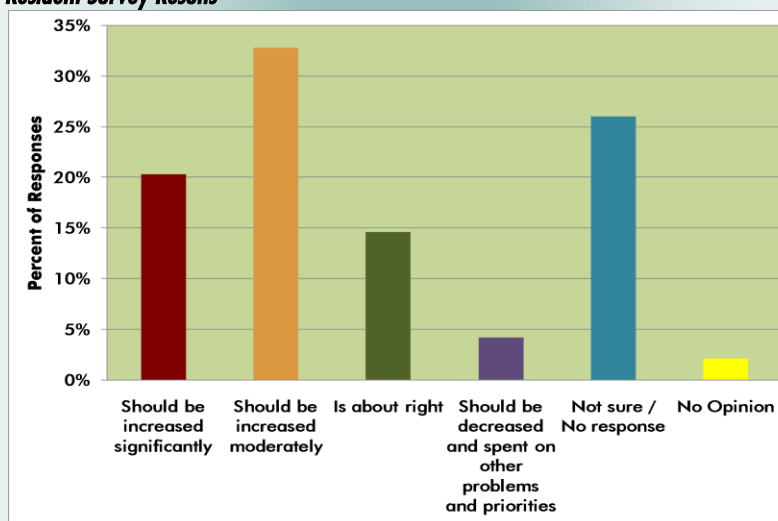
Survey Results

In your opinion, does it appear that the amount of TAX FUNDING spent on Transportation in the Cedar Rapids Metro Area:

Business Survey Results



Resident Survey Results



The following table shows the average proposed mix of residential densities from the nine tables at the Visioning Forum compared with the current mix of residential densities.

- Eight of the nine tables believed that there should be some shift from low density residential to medium and high density residential and mixed-use development. When averaging all tables, the single-family category, which currently accommodates 85% of all dwelling units, was reduced to approximately 50%. Land uses that were consistent across most of the table were:
 - Industrial uses targeted to existing industrial areas, particularly in the southwest portion of the region
 - More new development to the north, focused on the communities of Robins, Hiawatha, and Marion, than to the south around Fairfax, Ely, and Shueyville.
 - Support for the long-term viability of and investment in the Cedar Rapids downtown. Most tables supported redevelopment with higher residential densities and commercial and mixed-use development.

Residential Mix		
	<i>Current</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
Low Density (4 – 5 DU/Acre)	85%	50%
Medium Density (8 – 10 DU/Acre)	10%	22%
High Density (12 – 16 DU/Acre)	5%	18%
Mixed-Use (Residential + Commercial)	0%	10%
Total	100%	100%

Decision Point 2 – Alternatives Development and Evaluation

What We Did

At Decision Point 2, public participation focused on understanding priorities for the Plan goals and preferences with respect to three future scenarios. Public participation activities included:

- Future Scenarios Workshops
- Inquiry On The Go

These activities again provided different ways to participate. In the workshops, people came together to discuss their views. In the Inquiry On The Go, people at the mall took time out to discuss the Plan with staff and share their individual preferences. In addition, a Public Officials Workshop brought together officials from throughout the region to hear the community’s comments and discuss future directions.

Future Scenario Workshops

Approximately 65 people participated in two future scenario workshops on February 18, 2010, from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. and from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Cedar Rapids. Each workshop was divided into two parts. First, participants worked in small groups to rate the importance of Plan goals. Then, participants discussed the strengths of three future scenarios and identified the features of their preferred scenario.

Inquiry on the Go

Recognizing that it is often difficult to attract people to public forums, the project team conducted an Inquiry on the Go to engage other people in the community. On February 17, the project team hosted a display at Linn County West. Project team members introduced the planning process to people walking by and asked for their input on Plan goals and scenarios. A total of 22 people visited the display and shared their opinion on Plan goals and the alternative scenario.

The three future scenarios included a trend suburban scenario, a moderate growth scenario, and an infill/redevelopment focus scenario. The trends scenario reflected a more road-based plan, while the infill/redevelopment scenario substantially increased both transit and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Public Officials Workshop

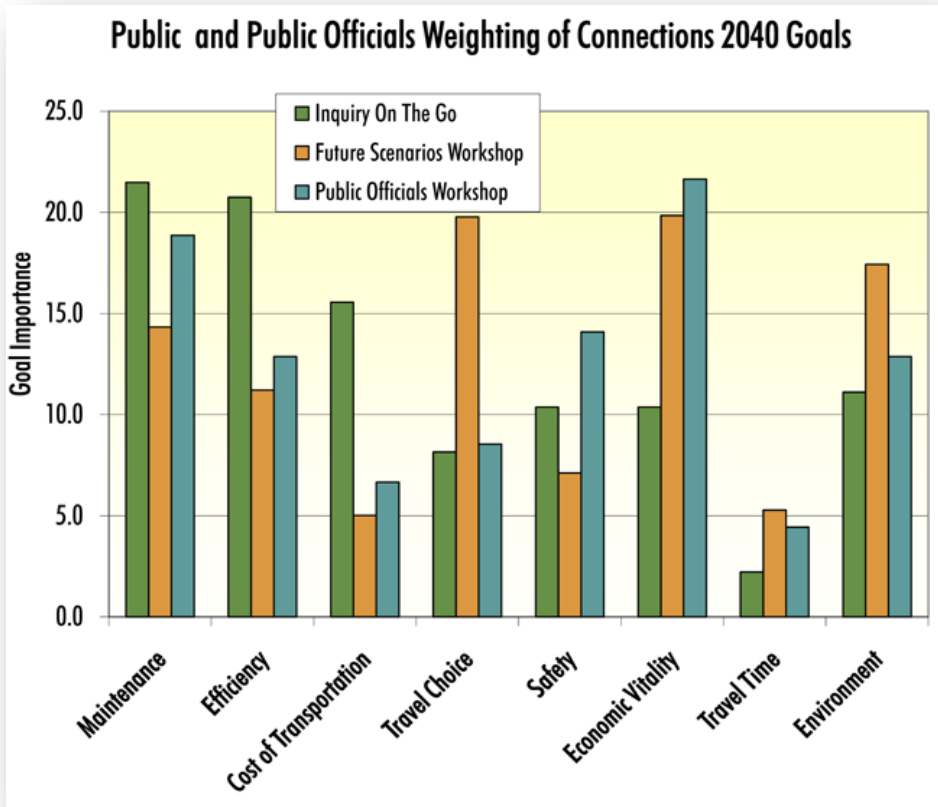
On February 19, 2010, approximately 10 local officials gathered in Cedar Rapids from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. to hear about Plan progress and provide input. Following an introductory presentation, the local officials discussed the Plan goals, future scenarios, and implications of future choices for the region.

What We Learned

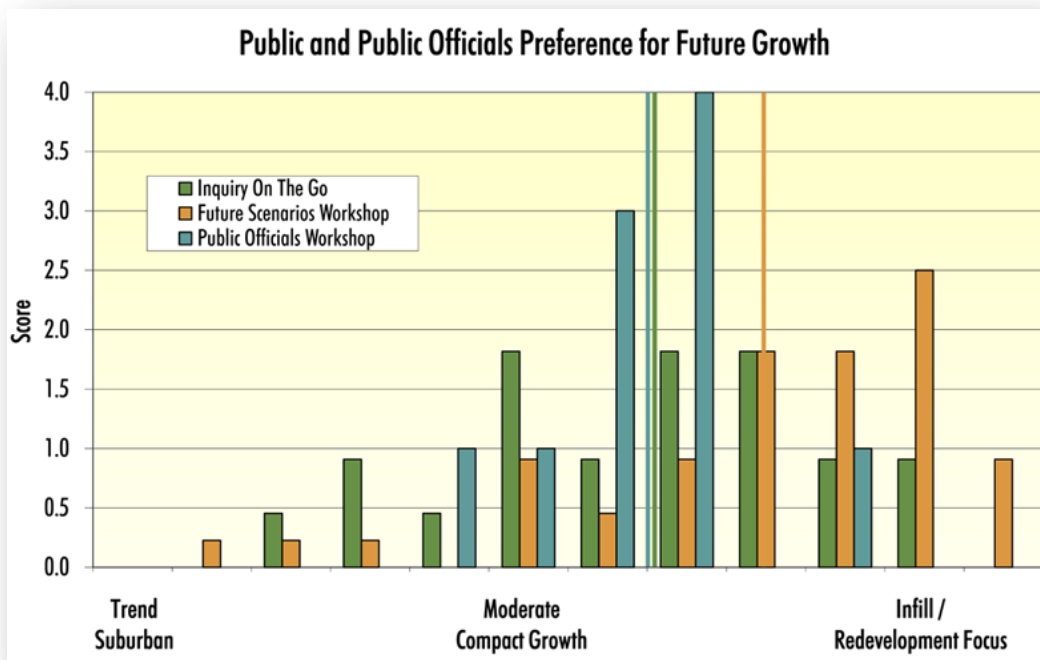
While all the goals were deemed important by participants, the top three goals at the public workshops were travel choice, economic vitality, and environmental protection. At the mall, the top goals were maintaining the system, maximizing efficiency, and minimizing transportation costs. Public officials agreed with the participants at the mall about the importance of



maintenance and with the workshop participants about the importance of economic vitality. Their third most important goal was providing a safe and secure transportation system.



Clearly, the need to make the most of what we have and to operate the system as efficiently as possible is a priority. In addition, people believe the transportation system needs to help the region address economic challenges. Many workshop participants recognized the link between a strong economy, environmental health, and a transportation system that provides choices. Staying competitive was viewed as being critical in keeping young educated workers who bring jobs and revenues to help pay for transportation infrastructure.



This chart identifies the distribution of responses from the three groups. The thin lines reflect the weighted average of each group. As presented, the weighted average from the Inquiries on the Go and Public Officials Workshop was virtually the same, favoring a future that the density is higher than Moderate Compact Growth, but less than Infill/ Redevelopment Focus. The attendees of the Future Scenarios Workshop favored slightly higher density.

There was a significant interest in moving toward more compact development. Participants at the Future Scenarios Workshops and people who stopped by the display at the mall indicated a desire to move toward infill/redevelopment. This is consistent with the results in Round 1 from both the business and resident surveys and the Visioning Forum. Similarly, the 12 officials at the Public Officials Workshop supported moving toward increased density.

Decision Point 3 – Selection and Refinement of a Preferred Plan

Connections 2040 reflects the community’s desired future and priorities for transportation connections. In this final step in the process, the community had the opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan. Three public meetings were held for this effort with approximately 40 persons. These meetings included summary boards of the plan highlights. Also, a 30-minute presentation of the plan highlights was presented at each meeting.

Conclusion

The public involvement process for Connections 2040 focused on providing multiple ways for people to get involved and influence the Plan's development. Input from several hundred regional community members directly affected Plan goals, alternatives studied, evaluation of those alternatives and the ultimate direction of the plan. Key messages from the public were:

- Be good stewards of the transportation infrastructure – continue the region's commitment to maintain what we have and operate the system efficiently.
- Set priorities that support economic vitality in the region – provide easy access to jobs and commerce, and provide choices and a quality environment to attract tomorrow's workforce.
- Move toward increased density in the region – revitalize downtown areas and capitalize on opportunities for mixed-use development throughout the region.
- Strengthen the transit system to provide quality transportation. Focus on serving those with limited options, like seniors, people without cars, disabled people and students and others too young to drive and expand to choice riders.
- Increase the region's emphasis on bicycle and pedestrian facilities and connectivity.

