

3.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS AND RESULTS

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION STUDY BACK BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Public involvement was an important part of the study, both to keep people informed about the process and results, and to solicit input on needs, issues, and solutions. Through a project website and Virtual Town Hall (VTH), the City maintained an active on-line outreach program for the duration of the study. In addition, a CIM was held early in the study process to encourage participation and expand the range of transportation options considered. The study process also included a TAC, composed of representatives from the BBNWR, DCR, HRT, and City staff. During the course of the study, City staff and the consultant team met with various stakeholder groups, as listed in Section 3.4, to solicit additional information.

3.1 Public Information

A variety of print and electronic information tools were employed to keep the community informed about the purpose and status of the study. These included the study website, Virtual Town Hall, and two Citizen Information Meetings.

3.1.1 Study Website and Virtual Town Hall

During the course of the project, the City maintained the www.VBgov.com/BackBayGrant project website to provide information, meeting notifications, comment form, and access to the VTH. During the official comment period for CIM #1, 184 people visited the VTH site. VTH is a web-based tool for public participation on City initiatives. This study used the VTH to solicit ideas of additional alternatives to access BBNWR, to provide input on the establishing the weighted value of the final alternatives, and to keep the public informed on the progress of the study.

The project website provides the platform for keeping citizens and those with interest in the project informed. The site includes background on the grant supporting the study, the scope of the study, public input opportunities, the study schedule, and some document sharing. If anyone has a question regarding the study there is a link to ask questions directly to the project manager. The site has been a valuable tool in keeping the public involved.

On a monthly basis, from June 2014 through April 2015, email blasts were sent as the study progressed to those registered through the project website.

3.1.2 Email Updates

City staff sent project overview updates to 250+ individual email addresses around the first Monday of each month from the first CIM through project completion. Citizens were able to opt into the updates either at the CIM or on the City's project webpage.



3.2 Citizen Information Meeting #1 and Public Comment Period

Citizen Information Meeting (CIM) #1 was held at Red Mill Elementary School on August 7, 2014 with two primary goals:

- to solicit additional alternatives for the study; and
- to weight the evaluation criteria for use during the study.

A complete meeting report is provided in the Appendix. The goals of the CIM were to solicit alternatives and weigh evaluation factors. The CIM was attended by 95 people, and included a formal presentation, informal discussion, graphic display boards, comment forms, and open boards for participants to provide written responses to questions. Meeting attendees could submit completed comment forms at the meeting, and the public comment period remained open until September 9, 2014. By the end of the comment period, 84 responses had been received.

The meeting report provides additional detail, but 89% of respondents identified themselves as year-round residents, and nearly three quarters said that their primary means of accessing BBNWR was by car. Regarding barriers to alternative transportation, 32% of respondents said that lack of sidewalk and bicycle trails deterred them from using means other than their car to get to BBNWR.

Respondents also identified a range of variations on the initial set of ATS options, as well as many new ideas for consideration in the study. Protecting natural, cultural, and historic resources were identified as the most important factor in evaluating ATS solutions. The input was used by the study team and the TAC to refine and evaluate the potential solutions.

CITIZEN INFORMATION MEETING



Alternative Transportation Study Public Meeting

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge

August 2014

ABOUT BACK BAY

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 545 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System that is administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Established in 1938, Back Bay comprises approximately 9,000 acres in southeastern Virginia and is a showcase for large concentrations of waterfowl. The Refuge provides opportunities for the visiting public to experience the outdoors through fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. It is through these opportunities that people connect with nature, foster an appreciation for its beauty, and become inspired to help protect it.

For more information on the study, visit:
www.VBgov.com/BackBayGrant

Welcome

Thank you for your participation in this important transportation study. The City of Virginia Beach, in coordination with Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, is evaluating ways for visitors to access Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and False Cape State Park without using private motor vehicles. At this first public information meeting, the study team is soliciting your ideas on alternative transportation solutions and your opinion on the relative importance of the screening criteria.

Study Background

The study is being funded by a \$449,000 planning grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The money is provided by the FTA's Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Program (TRIPP), designed to fund projects that will provide safe, convenient access for visitors to America's national parks, forests and wildlife refuges, and modernize aging transportation infrastructure.

Experience the Fun!
 Virginia Beach Parks and Recreation

3.2.1 Newspaper Advertisements and News Releases

Newspaper advertisements were placed in the Virginian Pilot – Virginia Beach Beacon to advertise the citizen information meeting. To broaden the advertisement, news releases were sent to local print and broadcast media.

3.2.2 Email Announcements

Two rounds of email blast announcements regarding the CIM were sent to 161 stakeholder database contacts, some of whom further disseminated the email announcements. One email announcement was also distributed to eighteen Title VI groups, such as Council on Diversity and Inclusion (United Way), ODU Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity, and Council of United Filipino/Phillipine Cultural Center.

3.2.3 Video Posting

WTKR Newschannel 3 posted a video story about the project in advance of the first CIM. <http://wtkr.com/2014/07/28/ditching-the-car-to-get-to-back-bay-national-wildlife-refuge/>

3.2.4 Meeting Flyer

In advance of CIM #1, an informational flyer was distributed to businesses, community centers, and other locations within the study area.

3.2.5 Environmental Justice and Other Special Targeted Outreach

Special targeted outreach was conducted to ensure that diverse segments of the population were given the opportunity to become involved in the study. Title VI groups were identified and included low income, minority, seniors, and disabled.



Back Bay Refuge Trail
CIM #1

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge
Alternative Transportation Study Public Meeting



Mark your calendar!
Join us for a public information meeting to discuss ideas for enhancing environmentally-friendly visitor access to Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge (BBNWR) and False Cape State Park.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 7, 2014
6:00 – 7:30 p.m.
Red Mill Elementary School
1860 Sandbridge Road, Virginia Beach

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

The City of Virginia Beach wants your input on a study that is considering transportation alternatives for visitors to reach **BBNWR** without using private motor vehicles. Transportation alternatives include providing trams from populated areas of the city to the refuge, construction of a shared-use path for biking and walking, and development of canoe/kayak facilities. Please bring your suggestions for other transportation alternatives.

Learn more online at **VBgov.com/backbaygrant**
Send your comments by September 9, 2014

We strive to provide reasonable accommodations and services for persons who require assistance to participate. For special assistance, call 757-385-0400 or TTY 711 by August 4, 2014.

Sign up!
VBgov.com/eNews

VBGOV.COM/BACKBAYGRANT
BACKBAYGRANT@VBGOV.COM
757.385.1100 (TTY: DIAL 711)

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Virginia Beach Parks and Recreation

Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation is accredited by CAPRA, certifying agency of the National Recreation & Park Association.

CIM Notice

3.3 Citizen Information Meeting #2 and Public Comment Period

The study team conducted the Citizen Information Meeting (CIM) #2 at Red Mill Elementary School on November 3, 2015 with two goals:

- ◆ to present the findings of the Study; and
- ◆ to solicit feedback on the alternatives.

A complete meeting report is available in the Appendix. Advertisement of the meeting followed the same approach as CIM #1 using news media; email advertisement through the project website database and 18 Title VI groups; and distribution of meeting flyers.

Much like the CIM #1, the meeting included a formal presentation with a question and answer session, informal discussion at display boards, and information sheets with a comment form insert. Sixty-eight (68) citizens attended the meeting. Some attendees submitted completed forms as they left the meeting, while others took them home along with copies to share with neighbors. The study team posted the presentation, information sheet and comment form to the City's Virtual Town Hall website. The comment

period remained open until December 4, 2015. By then, interested parties had submitted 103 responses in hardcopy or through Virtual Town Hall.

The comment responses came from 96 year-round residents of Virginia Beach, six seasonal residents, and one visitor. Eleven (11) further defined their status with four representatives of recreational groups and seven business owners. Sandbridge residents accounted for 16% of the responses.

The Back Bay Refuge Trail received the highest positive response for probable use with 64% indicating frequency of use on a monthly basis or more often. Similarly, 43% of the respondents indicated they would use the Sigma Trail monthly or more often, Shuttle Services - 16%, Water Access - 26%, Water Taxi - 14%. Thirty (30) respondents noted that they would use the launch sites. The launch site use in order of frequency, highest to lowest, was indicated as follows: future Visitor Contact Station, existing Visitor Contact Station, Mill Landing, Lovitt's Landing, Barbour Hill, Horn Point, and Princess Anne Wildlife Management Area.

Currently, less than 50% of the respondents indicated that they visit the Refuge monthly or more frequently. According to the responses, if the alternatives were in place, that number would increase to 68%, with 17% visiting once a year and 15% never visiting at all.

The study team considered all 60 public comments received while developing the recommendations for each of the alternatives.

- ◆ Thirty-nine (39) commenters expressed general support for enhanced multimodal access in the project area;
- ◆ nine (9) stated their opposition to the construction of any of the alternatives; while
- ◆ twelve (12) provided other comments not directly related to the scope of this study.

Consistent with input received throughout the study process, several respondents expressed concern related to potential impacts to environmental resources and disturbance of the wildlife that the Refuge seeks to protect.

3.4 Stakeholder Meetings

To broaden public input, and to provide focused input from affected organizations, members of the study team participated in a series of stakeholder meetings. Each meeting included board display and handout material used for CIM #1, and attendees were encouraged to offer their input on ATS options, issues, and evaluation criteria. Meetings were held with both City and citizen groups:

CITY GROUPS:

- ◆ BIKEWAYS AND TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BTAC)
- ◆ OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (OSAC)
- ◆ TRANSITION AREA/INTERFACILITY TRAFFIC AREA CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
- ◆ CITY POLICE, FIRE & EMS

CITIZEN GROUPS:

- ◆ SANDBRIDGE CIVIC LEAGUE
- ◆ MONTHLY SOUTHERN DISTRICT FORUM – HOSTED BY CITY COUNCIL MEMBER BARBARA HENLEY
- ◆ SOUTH SHORE ESTATES CIVIC LEAGUE
- ◆ BACK BAY RESTORATION FOUNDATION
- ◆ 1ST PRECINCT CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

3.5 Public Involvement Results

Hundreds of people engaged in the process and more than a hundred provided a response in some form. Comments were documented, weighted, and scored in a process to establish a reasonable list of alternatives. The public involvement process was successful in identifying three additional alternatives which were not in the original list included in the grant application.

3.5.1 Pre-screening Criteria

The alternatives evaluation process is described in Chapter 4 of this report, and used public input to assist with the evaluation. Based on responses during the public comment period, the criteria for pre-screening the wide range of possible options suggested by the public were weighted as listed in Table 3.1. The order of importance resulted directly from public comments. The weighted criteria allowed the TAC to screen an initial list of 47 possible ATS options and agree upon a final list of six alternatives for evaluation.

3.5.2 Refined ATS Options

Public comment also helped guide the refinement of the BBRT option. Initially, the BBRT was envisioned to continue along the north side of Sandbridge Road east of the intersection of the Nimmo ROW and Sandbridge Road. This original concept would have necessitated the trail crossing Sandbridge Road at the intersection with Sandpiper Road. However, public input suggested crossing Sandbridge Road further west and then following the south side of Sandbridge Road. This would allow the BBRT to connect directly with the realty and rental operations on the south side of the road.

Additionally, while the BBRT originally considered on-road facilities on Sandpiper Road, the public also suggested considering a shared road condition on Sandfiddler Road, as an additional option for the trail. Sandfiddler Road provides a route with less automobile traffic which travels slower. Based on this input, the concepts for the BBRT were refined and advanced.

3.5.3 Additional ATS Options

Public comment generated a large number of suggestions for additional ATS options, and this went through pre-screening as discussed above. The pre-screening process generated two additional ATS options that were advanced in the evaluation:

- ◆ construction of a SUP along Sandbridge Road from Lotus Drive to the Nimmo ROW; and,
- ◆ development of a water taxi service.

3.5.4 Community Awareness and Engagement

In addition to the tangible results of the public process listed herein, the City's efforts have increased community awareness of ATS, of the long-term goals of the FWS, and of multimodal transportation needs in general. The project resulted in a significant and sustained level of engagement that benefited the project and also provides a foundation for future involvement as individual implementation efforts proceed.

TABLE 3.1: WEIGHTED CRITERIA

IMPORTANCE	CRITERIA	WEIGHT
Most important	Protect sensitive natural, cultural, and historical resources	24%
Second-most important	Enhance visitor mobility, accessibility, and safety	23%
Third-most important	Improve visitor education, recreation, and health	19%
Fourth-most important	Reduce traffic congestion	19%
Least important	Reduce pollution	15%

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