



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Highway  
Administration**

**Public Involvement for Transportation Decision-making**

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**SOUTH SACRAMENTO,  
CALIFORNIA,  
LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT/  
LA LINEA DEL SUR**

**September 1997**

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# FORWARD

One way to find out how to use public involvement techniques effectively is to learn from the experiences of others. **SOUTH SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT/LA LINEA DEL SUR**, describes proactive public involvement during project development in an area with large and diverse ethnic populations. It is one of three separate case studies of public involvement. The others are:

- **METROPLAN (LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS): "Pouring Water on Dry Ground,"** a mid-sized metropolitan planning organization using varied public involvement techniques to start involvement early in long range transportation planning.
- **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AT OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION,** a variety of public involvement experiences in both project development and statewide planning.

Copies of these case studies are available from:

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# NOTICE

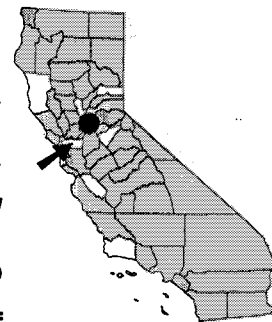
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# Case Study: SOUTH SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT/ LA LINEA DEL SUR



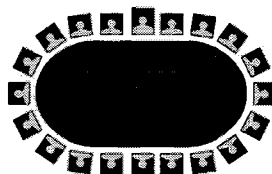
Sacramento, California's State capital, is not a tourist mecca in the same way San Francisco and Los Angeles are. Yet, in many of its physical and cultural characteristics, it's very much "California": people are spread out, distances are great, and everyone has a car.

In the face of growth projections that will further burden a highway system unable to expand, how does an agency get an auto-oriented culture such as Sacramento's interested in a new mode and enlist true support? Sacramento's transit agency, the Sacramento Regional Transit District (Regional Transit), through its South Sacramento Transit Alternatives Project, conducted a comprehensive and exciting public outreach program for project development and capitalized on the success of the region's first light rail starter line. The program engaged many people, attracted them enough to become committed to an extension of its basic system, and ultimately helped build a base of support for a light rail network from citizens willing to provide funding for transit.

Regional Transit's outreach program was fundamentally proactive and not fueled by controversy. Understanding that getting people interested in a relatively new mode of transportation would be a long-term task, Regional Transit started its outreach early to avoid delays and problems later. The outreach involved not only traditional environmental and transit groups but also those residents and workers in the study area who have few transportation options. The transit corridor studied has a large ethnic population including Chinese, Southeast Asian, African-American, and Hispanic people. Reaching out to these people and the general public without the threat of disension or controversy resulted in an extremely broad, sophisticated, and effective base of active support for transit and for securing transit funding.

## The public involvement program

From the beginning of the Transit Alternatives Study, the Regional Transit undertook a public involvement program that was multi-faceted, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual. Understanding that people learn and participate in different ways and with different styles, Regional Transit developed its outreach program to give people many ways to



provide input. As a result, Regional Transit effectively reached many people and diverse organizations, particularly those from ethnic neighborhoods and businesses, and kept them active in a long, complex planning project.

The program's basic elements were:

- maximizing input and guidance on technical issues through two advisory committees that met monthly;
- providing opportunities for input and an understanding of the decision-making process at community meetings and presentations; and
- providing a variety of ways to get information on the study and get interested in the outcome—such as multi-lingual newsletters, ads at transit stops, fliers, displays, and more.

Some of the broad variety of techniques Regional Transit used were innovative:

- ads on transit benches in the study-area communities;
- project information enclosed in student report card envelopes;
- multi-lingual Spanish, Chinese, and English project literature;
- interviews on ethnic radio stations;
- racks for project information in ethnic grocery stores;
- attendance at special ethnic events and festivals;
- a unique, catchy logo and theme used on all literature;
- written responses to comment cards received at all meetings; and
- "homework" assignments for members of the community advisory committee (CAC).

Others were traditional:

- community advisory committee;
- meeting fliers;
- hotline;
- fact sheets;
- comment cards; and
- newsletters.

Not everything Regional Transit did was successful at reaching or engaging people. Large public meetings or

## CASE STUDIES

open houses, for example, had disappointing attendance. When a technique failed, however, Regional Transit made adaptations or selected and implemented substitutes.

Clearly more effective and interesting for ethnic populations were techniques that reached people where they live or work and did not require them to go out of their way to attend meetings or read about the project:

- bench-board ads;
- information at local grocery stores;
- meetings hosted by local community groups;
- information included in the literature of ethnic chambers of commerce; and
- attendance at events in the neighborhoods.

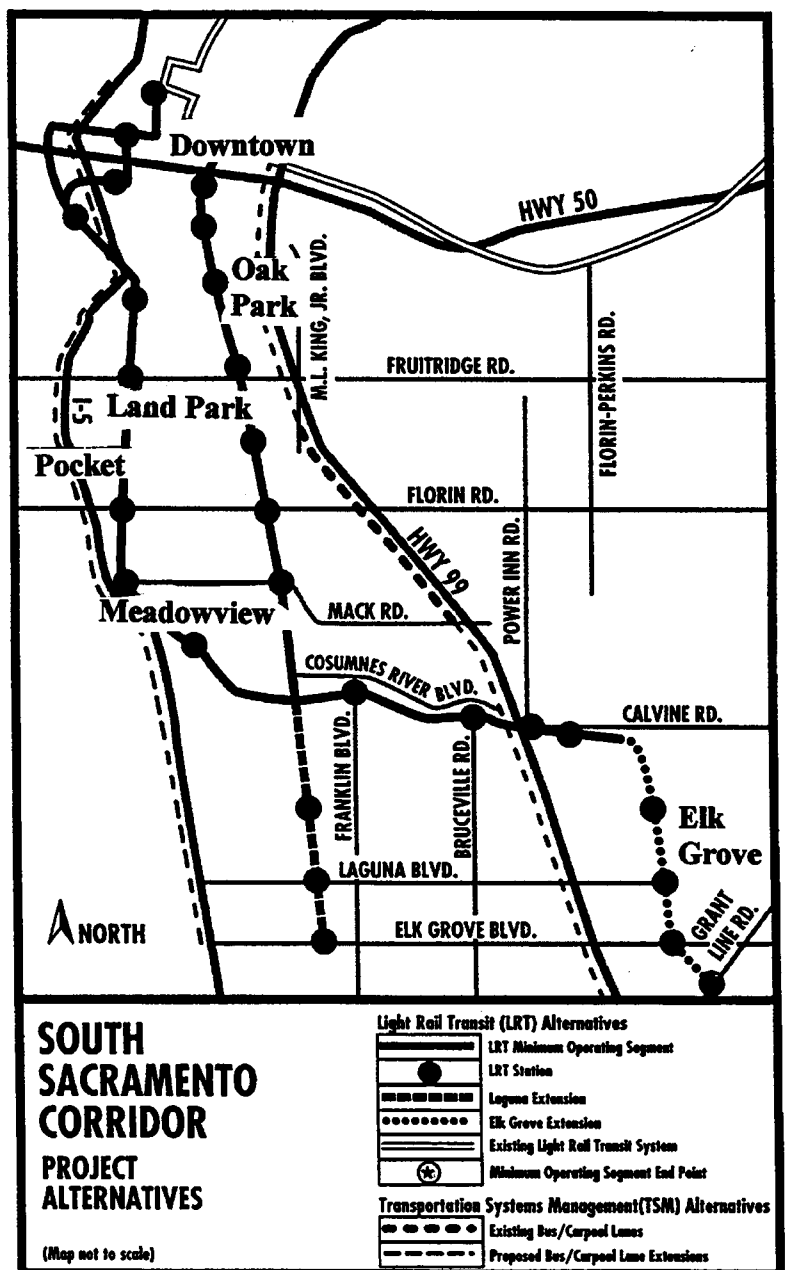
Several key people involved in the study felt that these techniques worked particularly well because they indicated that Regional Transit understood that people acquire information and respond in various ways, some culturally influenced. They also showed that Regional Transit was sincere in its attempts to reach people who frequently are not asked to participate.

Participants felt that the overall process used to get input from the public and generate widespread awareness was successful and effective. Members of Regional Transit's advisory committees commented that the overall public involvement program in South Sacramento—and specifically the ethnic outreach—worked because the agency persevered and used a combination of new and standard techniques. Many said that Regional Transit asked for and got feedback and input from the range of interests, responded appropriately, dealt with “subsidiary” issues effectively, and gave ample opportunity to be closely involved or to comment in a variety of venues and styles. This required understanding how different people respond and what is needed to activate them, and realizing that the process itself must be flexible and responsive.

been major employers, along with agriculture and education. In recent years, the service and financial sectors and high-tech manufacturing have added to Sacramento's employment base. The population of Sacramento and the four-county region grew about 35 percent from 1980 to 1990. Similarly, the number of jobs in the Sacramento metropolitan area grew by 49 percent during this same period.

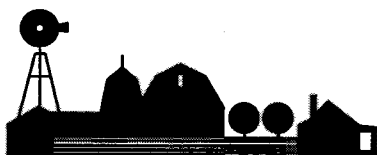
The South Sacramento corridor is about 15 miles long and 5 to 8 miles wide. More than 13 communities are located in the study area, many of them home to ethnic groups (see Figure 1). A significant portion of the regional labor

**Figure 1. South Sacramento corridor study area**



## About Sacramento and the project

Sacramento is 90 miles east of San Francisco. Now a city of 393,500 in a four-county metropolitan area of over 1.5 million people, Sacramento was founded as Sutter's Fort during the Gold Rush era. Not much gold was found, but the city prospered due to its productive agricultural resources. It has been the State capital since 1854. According to Regional Transit's project studies, State and Federal Governments have long



force lives in the growing South Sacramento corridor, but only 11 percent of the region's jobs are found there. Thus, many residents commute to work outside the corridor.

Employment projections for the year 2010 show substantial increases in jobs: 100 percent in the overall Sacramento region, 97 percent in the South Sacramento corridor, and 91 percent in downtown Sacramento. Given these projections, past commuting trends are very likely to continue. The ethnic neighborhoods in the South Sacramento area are dispersed throughout the corridor. The African-American population is concentrated primarily in the southern portion of the corridor and the Asian community primarily in the northeastern part of the corridor, while the Hispanic population is dispersed throughout the corridor. Median incomes vary widely; some census tracts have average incomes less than \$20,000; higher-income neighborhoods are located in the northwest (Land Park and Pocket neighborhoods) and in the newer areas of the southern part (Elk Grove and Laguna).

Most residents use their cars for work and other trips. Some 76 percent of the region's work trips were drive-alone trips, with 17.2 percent via carpool/vanpool. Although the percent of all work trips made by transit is relatively low in the region, the South Sacramento area has a significantly higher percentage of work trips by transit than the rest of the region.

## **Transit in South Sacramento**

It is not surprising that South Sacramento would have been an attractive corridor for transit investment, considering the magnitude of the projected growth in jobs in the Sacramento Central Business District, the inability to accommodate the anticipated new auto trips on the existing roadways, air quality mandates, and the need to address transit-service equity problems in the South Sacramento corridor. The Sacramento Area Council of Governments Metropolitan Transportation Plan calls for a wide range of transportation improvements over the next 20 years, including more public transit service and carpool lanes on freeways, among other things. Regional Transit, which runs the system's 60 bus routes, light rail line, seven park-and-ride lots, and a paratransit fleet, traded highway funds for transit and built the first of a regional system of light rail lines, 18.3 miles long, to the north and northeast.

Residents in transit-dependent South Sacramento who thought their neighborhoods should have gotten light rail first pushed and convinced Regional Transit that the next line should be the south line. This line would be able to meet Federal cost-effectiveness criteria based on high ridership and could successfully compete for discretionary Federal transit funding. The State would then be leveraging Federal dollars for economic development, transit equity, and social justice purposes by pursuing discretionary Federal transit funding. The "starter line" is considered a success, carrying over 23,000 weekday riders

after 13 years of operation. Following the Federal Transit Administration Systems Planning Study, in 1992 Regional Transit began the draft environmental impact analysis studies, a \$3.3 million analysis of transportation-investment options for the south corridor.

The South Sacramento Transit Alternatives Project environmental studies were initiated in June 1992, prior to the President's Executive Order on Environmental Justice and other regulations that explicitly require project sponsors to seek out the traditionally underserved. The technical environmental analysis and alternatives studies looked at seven transit investment alternatives: a baseline alternative (only committed and fully funded transit and highway projects); two transportation systems management alternatives (express buses on high-occupancy vehicle lanes); and four light rail transit alternatives on two existing railroad alignments.

Regional Transit conducted a public involvement process that went far beyond earlier efforts in both scope and intensity. For the south line, Regional Transit conducted a particularly open and impartial process, one that examined alternatives that were not necessarily being pushed by the agency or by any constituency. It reached out to neighborhoods that are not accustomed to having government come to them. It printed information in languages people in the neighborhoods could read. Regional Transit hired consultants who could speak Spanish and understood how to communicate clearly to the average person. It organized cohesive advisory committees and met with them monthly, responding to questions and challenges in a timely fashion.

Despite the relatively few requirements for public involvement, Regional Transit initiated a big and involved program. Regional Transit did so because it understood it was critical to deal not only with abutters or the traditional transit and environmental boosters but also with the larger community. It was clear to Regional Transit that, for a relatively new mode such as light rail to gain favor in Sacramento, it was important to reach out to a wide audience, because each light rail line was part of a much larger system of rail and bus facilities. Each line was viewed not as an isolated new transit start but as part of an overall network. Some members of one of the advisory committees said it was also clear that the outreach program needed to be developed, organized, and conducted to ensure that many people, inside and outside the corridor, understood the project and would become advocates for the line if funding issues became a question.

Finally, Regional Transit's project manager was personally aware that the people who would live with the transit line and benefit from it had to be involved in its planning and in steering Regional Transit in the right direction. She recognized that the planning process was an education, too—for both community representatives *and* Regional Transit.

## Developing the Outreach Program

When Regional Transit began the environmental studies process, the public already had some interest in and knowledge of the project due to issues surrounding the starter line in the 1980s. Nevertheless, Regional Transit knew the importance and value of input on the scope of the alternatives and of early identification of the important topics and issues to be included in the participation program. The need for an excellent and exciting outreach program was made clear to consultants proposing for the job, and the selected team laid out a good program that was flexible, yet organized and comprehensive.

The overall public involvement program was developed with significant input by the communities, achieved in several ways. First, Regional Transit hired its consultant team well in advance of the Federal Scoping Sessions, at which the public and agencies commented on various aspects of the project. Because the community liaison specialists had already been on the job for several months, learning about the issues and the key people, Regional Transit learned and thus was better prepared at scoping.

Second, the agency included a bilingual, minority public relations firm with experience in Sacramento. This firm was already familiar with many issues that could arise and prevent effective public involvement, including cultural issues. Key people who were involved in the study stated that Regional Transit gained tremendous credibility by including this firm with local knowledge, a good track record, special expertise, and cultural sensitivity.

Finally, by the time Regional Transit was establishing the advisory committee for the project and finalizing the public involvement program, it had already been in touch with dozens of people through a variety of activities who advised the staff on what many of the issues would be, whom to reach for ongoing input, and what techniques might be useful.

Developing the actual public participation program involved several key activities. Regional Transit began by conducting more than 50 key person interviews, talking with community leaders and representatives from business groups, elected officials, agencies, and others on their own home turf. Suggestions and ideas—such as identifying neighborhood associations to include in the process, getting names of key people for the mailing list, and targeting potential CAC members—came out of these interviews and were valuable in designing the overall public involvement program.

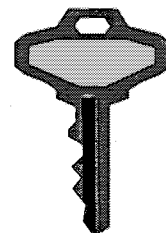
At the beginning of the public process, the publicity and information distributed about the scoping sessions were another key element to developing the outreach program. These included:

- a newsletter with a questionnaire, distributed to the project mailing list before the scoping sessions;
- multi-lingual car cards in light rail vehicles and buses announcing the scoping sessions;

- display ads in community newspapers; and
- reminder postcards.

Regional Transit held four scoping sessions in community locations to make it easy for people to attend. Feedback on both the approach/process and the transit study itself was given at the scoping sessions. Comments on the scoping process received via the project hotline were used to fine-tune the public involvement program.

## Key elements of the outreach



The consensus of those interviewed for this case study was that the keys to Regional Transit's ethnic outreach program, as well as its overall outreach, were its approach, the attitude of key personnel conducting the program, and support of the agency.

The project team relied on neighborhood people to help organize and lead the outreach to ethnic communities. This community-based outreach reflected a desire to maximize the understanding of the project and process by many communities and constituencies, not just traditional participants. This effort contrasted with the more traditional process in which the agency attempted to organize neighborhoods and generate participation, despite being "outsiders" and not particularly sensitive to cultural issues and differences. The outreach program evolved from a "top-down" effort to a proactive, grass-roots, community-oriented program.

Regional Transit's attitudes toward public involvement reflected a sincere commitment to include key stakeholders and other affected citizens in planning for its system. Regional Transit had sought input from the public and ethnic agencies for previous projects and had demonstrated willingness and desire to talk to and listen to others. Everyone interviewed felt that perhaps the most critical agency individual whose attitude and commitment went a long way toward the success of the study was Regional Transit's project manager. She was a dynamic, energetic, outgoing African-American transit professional who had come to Sacramento from San Francisco, where activism for transit is high. Dedicating about 25 percent of her time to public involvement, she understood the community issues and understood that the study was as much about educating the community—and the agency—as it was about public transportation, ridership estimates, and engineering drawings. The project manager's ability to manage the technical analysis and be honest, open, and caring about the community participation process was a critical component.

According to CAC members and others involved, Regional Transit's public involvement process was guided by an attitude of persistence and a willingness to try any and all techniques to get people involved and keep them involved. The Regional Transit project manager personally had a

“never-give-up” attitude and demonstrated her commitment by continually modifying the outreach program. After holding an open house that drew a disappointing turnout, for example, Regional Transit staggered starting times, days of the week, and locations to increase attendance. When none of these had much of an effect on attendance, Regional Transit completely shifted the approach and enlisted the aid of the CAC members who represented organizations or neighborhood groups. Regional Transit succeeded in getting the groups to become co-sponsors of the meetings and asked the CAC members to work hard at getting people to come. Working jointly lent credibility to the event and dramatically boosted attendance. Another example of Regional Transit’s “trial and error” approach was learning to tailor presentations to ethnic groups in particular, to address issues that were culturally significant and to move away from those that were too distant and had little immediate effect on people’s lives. Those who participated said this willingness to try different things and to be persistent was instrumental in making the process work.

From the General Manager to the project staff, internal agency support in setting up the program and establishing goals, objectives, and funding also helped ensure its success. Getting assistance from the public relations and marketing staff as well as the planning manager and other technical staff showed commitment on the part of the agency as a whole and bolstered the project’s efforts. The project manager estimated that several senior staff and others spent about 25 percent of their time working on elements of the public involvement program, thus greatly enhancing the work of the consultants.

## **The cornerstones of the public involvement process**

The case study research showed that there were five basic elements that fostered the success of the ethnic and overall outreach process:

- personnel and their diligent approach;
- public information materials;
- bilingual capabilities and resources;
- meetings and special events and activities; and
- communication aids.

Each element was implemented in concert with the others to produce a comprehensible, logical public involvement program. Regional Transit used innovative techniques and special methods but also executed traditional public involvement efforts extremely well.

Innovative techniques included materials, events, and procedures. But, clearly, the most effective innovation was outreach to where people live and work (rather than relying on people to respond on their own initiative in a place that might not be comfortable to them).

Innovative ways of reaching out to the community included the following:

- **holding meetings in neighborhoods** in the South Sacramento corridor and adjacent communities and, specifically, co-sponsoring them with local community groups and business organizations. Attendance numbers showed that neighborhood meetings proved most effective in drawing people. Regional Transit also requested time on the agendas of neighborhood association meetings, using its CAC representatives as contacts. The clear advantage to holding Regional Transit meetings with a community co-sponsor was that the project gained much credibility and legitimacy when neighbors and friends participated. Also, attendance was typically better since people had already associated and organized with that group and were used to going to its meetings. The most successful meetings were those in which the South Sacramento Transit Alternatives Project was not the only item on the agenda. Finally, controversial neighborhood issues might draw a big crowd who would then stay for Regional Transit’s discussion.
- **producing, posting, and distributing bilingual information pieces** in places where people needed to go in their daily lives. Bilingual information pieces were not very useful if they were available only in traditional places such as agency offices, libraries, City Hall, where only those acquainted with these outlets go. Regional Transit created information pieces in English, Spanish, and Chinese and put them in places people need to go regularly—local ethnic grocery stores, convenience stores, community facilities, service organizations, and transit centers. The likelihood of reaching the targeted market increased dramatically.
- **distribution of materials through non-traditional means** such as stuffers in report cards and drop-in advertisements in newspapers. Distribution of materials through non-traditional means—such as sending information home to parents in report-card mailings and inserting notices in newspapers—provides information to people in documents they were certain to open and read. Different from a flier sent in its own envelope, insertions practically fall into people’s hands, where they’ll be noticed.
- **using neighborhood media outlets**, such as ethnic radio interviews. Ethnic radio, television, and print media outlets provide opportunities to reach people in their own world. Spanish-speaking radio proved an effective medium, and the Regional Transit project manager participated in several bilingual public affairs radio shorts. Because there are typically relatively few ethnic stations and papers in one city, many people tuned in.
- **posting ads and displays** (such as bench-board advertising) in prominent places in the community and Regional Transit vehicles and bus stops, showing the agency’s phone numbers. Several poster/display

boards were created and placed where there was heavy pedestrian traffic in the communities. These were bilingual Spanish/English and Chinese/English. All included the logo and hotline number. One commenter noted that one of the most innovative and effective things Regional Transit did was advertise on the backs of benches at 35 transit stops in the communities in the South Sacramento corridor (see Figure 2). The ads appeared where transit users went to the bus stop and were visible along major streets in the corridor. The prominent hotline number on the bench-board ads generated many phone calls.

**Figure 2. Bench-board ad at a Regional Transit bus stop.**



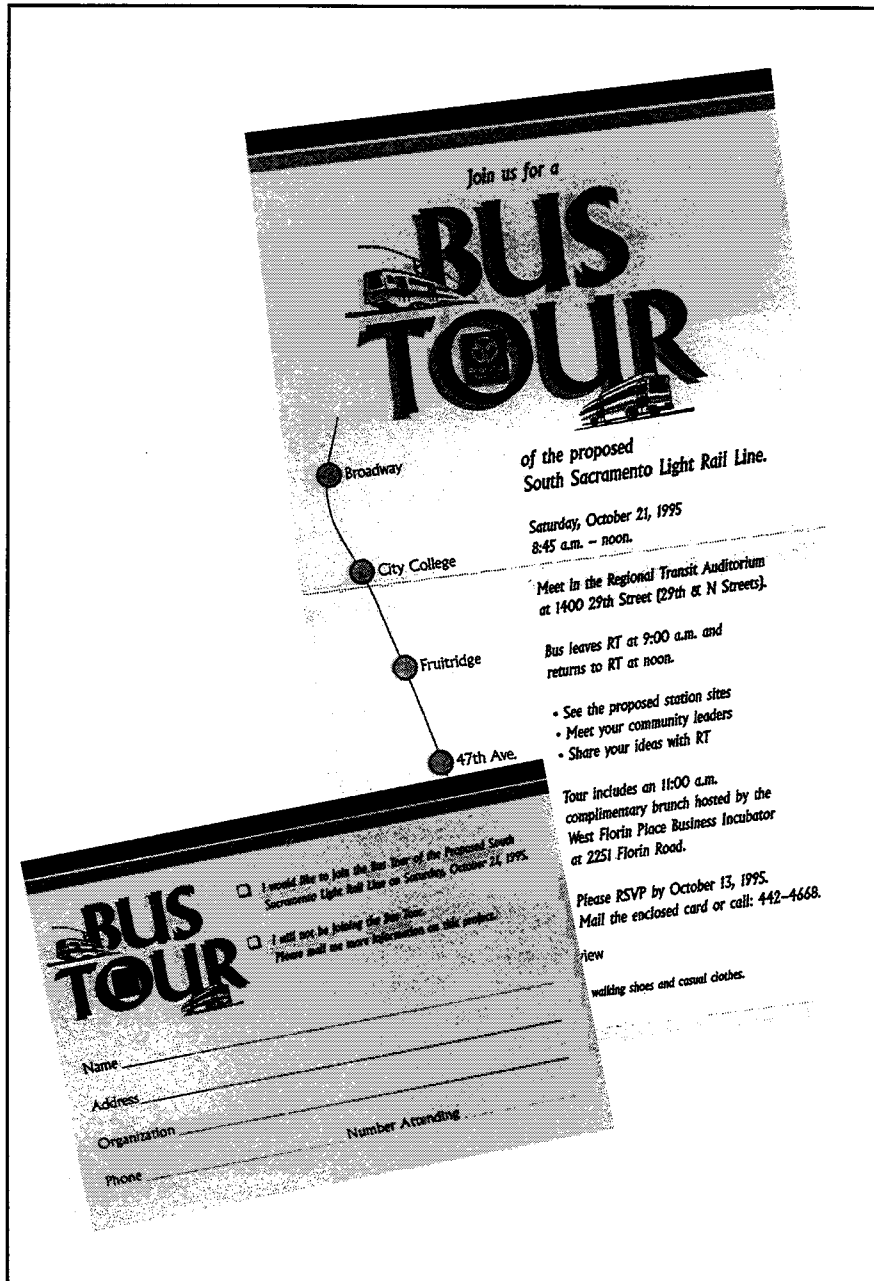
- **providing updates in newsletters** of Asian, African-American, and Hispanic chambers of commerce. Members of organizations, clubs, and associations often read literature from their organization more promptly than that from other groups. Regional Transit sent updates and information about the projects and meetings to the South Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Sacramento Black Chamber of Commerce, and others for inclusion in newsletters and for chamber leaders to use to update members at meetings. This kept business leaders up-to-date and enabled them to feel comfortable co-sponsoring a business leaders' reception later in the study process. Because the reception was a joint effort involving the chambers, they were committed to producing a good turnout. Participants felt that the reception itself led members and chamber leaders to a greater understanding of the project and a greater commitment to helping get the transit line built.
- **attending and participating in special ethnic and community events** within neighborhoods, such as the annual Fiesta de la Familia, the Pacific Rim Street Festival, farmers' markets, and a Martin Luther King Day event. Regional Transit came out to meet people where they lived and played. Not only did the communities become exposed to the study, but some participants also thought the process gained credibility when community people saw agencies and consultants participate on weekends and holidays.
- **conducting a bus tour** of the light rail corridor with local residents and agency representatives. The tour

gathered CAC members and community, agency, and business leaders on a Saturday morning for a three-hour ride along the proposed alignment. This provided an opportunity for residents and others to talk to Regional Transit representatives on their own home turf and on their free time (not during working hours). The bus tour was treated as a meeting, complete with official invitations, response cards, comment cards, and a detailed summary document (see Figure 3). Many felt that the attractive invitations and the lunch provided by a business in the corridor made the event a serious opportunity for input and discussion.

- **encouraging CAC members to disseminate materials and information** and getting these representatives from various neighborhoods to invite local residents to meetings and events. CAC members disseminated information and invited local residents to meetings and events. Regional Transit shifted its approach partway through the study to get more people involved. Although the outreach program had, from the start, been organized around the community group and neighborhood associations, the shift involved using the CAC members representing neighborhood organizations to actively disseminate materials and information. Regional Transit also gave CAC members "homework" assignments to set up community meetings, distribute fliers, and the like. CAC members were also asked to "bring" a certain number of people to meetings hosted by community organizations—and many did, increasing attendance significantly.
- **meeting with key neighborhood leaders** at the beginning of the process in familiar locations within their neighborhood. These meetings were conducted in comfortable, familiar places where the interviewer was the guest. For some from cultures quite different from those in the United States, going to a government office or public meeting to talk with an official representative of the government and give input is not second nature and may be uncomfortable. Meeting with someone in one's own neighborhood, talking with people riding the bus, or chatting with neighbors walking down the street is considerably less threatening and more productive. Other innovations included:
- **a logo/theme.** Regional Transit developed a catchy logo and theme—"A Moving Issue"—to help give a special identity to the study and make it easy for people to understand and remember it. All materials produced carried this logo and theme.
- **cultural sensitivity.** CAC members, who were among the most involved in the study process, said hiring a bilingual, minority consultant (Spanish-English) to work on the outreach program was very important to getting an early start on knowing the community leaders and issues. The consultant's understanding of cultural as well as language differences was critical to breaking down ethnic barriers and made securing Chinese translators and transcribers easier. The bilingual consultant was experienced in the community and, as a minority person, was able to empathize with many



**Figure 3. South Sacramento Corridor bus tour invitation.**



of those Regional Transit was trying to reach. For example, the consultant understood that “unassimilated” persons are often not comfortable showing up at a meeting they heard about “anonymously” on the radio or about which they received a mailing. But they might respond to a bilingual flier placed under the doormat on their porch, showing that the agency cared enough to go out to the neighborhood and walk around to individual houses. Similarly, the consultant was able to provide insight into ways ethnic groups affiliate and organize, which is often different from

the way other groups do. The minority consultant’s use of church affiliations proved an effective way to reach ethnic groups due to the strength and credibility of ethnic church organization, which is stronger than in many other churches. The CAC felt that having this consultant on-board from the beginning showed that Regional Transit wanted to make no mistakes—and thus gave the process credibility.

- **public acknowledgment of the CAC.** Publicity about the CAC and its composition—through printing members’ names and affiliations on project literature—helped elevate the CAC and legitimize the process; in particular, it lent credibility to the ethnic outreach. Listing all 40 CAC members, along with the Regional Transit officials and Federal officials, on a newsletter boosted the CAC’s sense of importance and responsibility. Also, members were treated to a holiday party at each December CAC meeting and given certificates of appreciation at the end of the environmental studies process, acknowledging their participation and hard work in a public way.
- **multi-lingual newsletters** that included a questionnaire on interests and concerns about transportation. Created for the scoping sessions, these provided feedback to Regional Transit. Later editions included a glossary of terms, basic project facts, a list of ways to contact someone to comment or get information, and other features.
- **unique articles**—in addition to standard press releases—for the ethnic media, emphasizing everyday concerns as well as long-range issues.

Equally important as innovative techniques were the common, “traditional” public involvement techniques that were executed particularly well. These included:

- **organizing a CAC that was representative, active, organized, and energized.** Regional Transit formed the CAC at the start of project development. Although many participants felt that CACs are common as advisory bodies, they stated that the Transit Alternatives Project CAC was unique in its cohesiveness and focus. Regional Transit made sure it had all the key people on the CAC: neighborhoods, business leaders, major employers in the study area, et al. It was critical to get the CAC as well-formed as possible

before convening to show that thought had been given to its composition. Nominations for members were solicited at scoping sessions as well as from recommendations from community leaders, and the agency made a sincere effort to have representation from all affected groups and constituencies. Several additional groups such as the Laguna Creek Community Association were subsequently added. The CAC was initially called *citizens'* advisory committee, but the project manager changed the name after the Hispanic community objected that it might discourage non-citizens from getting involved.

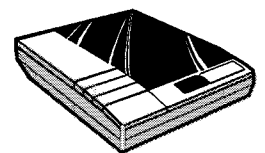
CAC meetings were well-organized. Monthly meetings were held on the same day and time, and meetings shifted to different locales in the study area. All locations were transit-accessible, and meetings started and finished on time. Two co-chairs were chosen by the group. Agenda, meeting notes, and review materials were mailed to all participants in advance. The study logo and theme appeared on all minutes. The materials were clear and comprehensive enough that CAC members who did not attend regularly could easily follow the process of the study. Those unable to attend a meeting would sometimes call and express concerns to the project manager, who would raise them at the next meeting. People who were interviewed said that active, enthusiastic, and committed people helped make the CAC work.

According to several CAC members, the project manager and co-chairs encouraged people to participate and created a positive, dynamic environment. The CAC enabled members to build rapport and have regular communication with Regional Transit, the consultants, other CAC members, and non-CAC community members. According to the project manager, several CAC members did not particularly like each other at the outset, but their work on the CAC together led them to understand each other better. Regional Transit made the CAC representatives "feel respected enough to participate" and empowered enough to be active. Regional Transit had the ability to empathize, put itself into the shoes of a CAC member and consider what made people go to meetings, fostered participation, and "made" people want to return. The Regional Transit project manager advised that the person leading a CAC needs to remember how he or she wants to be treated in a similar situation.

The CAC was not an average committee that confined its involvement to attending meetings. It was an energized group, spurred by the project manager, who successfully asked that CAC members be responsible for communicating with and educating their neighbors and associates. CAC members organized presentations and discussions by Regional Transit and the consultants on the transit study for their neighborhood associations; helped organize a joint meeting of 18 neighborhood groups; distributed fliers and other information pieces; co-authored articles for the newsletter and local newspapers; agreed to become spokes-

persons for the project; and more. Everyone interviewed said the South Sacramento CAC was a key element of the study process and was instrumental in building awareness and support for light rail transit in general. The CAC, a traditional technique, was carried out extremely well and created a strong, cohesive group that worked hard for transit in Sacramento.

- **organizing and systematically distributing literature and project material.** What made this ho-hum technique different and effective was that Regional Transit and the consultant team were creative and committed in treating this "task"—as some may view it—as a critical component of the awareness aspect of the public involvement program. Although many studies and projects produce and distribute fliers and fact sheets, the case study research shows Regional Transit did two things differently that made people take notice:
  - ▶ Materials were systematically distributed throughout the study area in high-traffic locations such as grocery stores, churches, centers, and the K Street Transit Center in downtown;
  - ▶ In addition to getting the materials out to where people live and work, Regional Transit and the consultants developed contacts at the sites who became responsible for monitoring the supply of materials in the racks. Different-sized materials were produced to fit different locations, such as rack cards for stores without big counters for materials. Materials including Spanish and Chinese literature were taken to special ethnic events to use at information tables. Particularly for the ethnic outreach, the annual Fiesta de la Familia and other cultural events were important targets for distributing literature.
- **using organization leaders to develop enthusiasm and attendance for project briefings in local neighborhood association meetings.** Regional Transit used neighborhood organization leaders to develop enthusiasm and a following for the study that was particularly creative in the ethnic communities. Regional Transit staff and consultants found that sending notices, even bilingual notices, did not encourage people enough to get them to attend meetings. They found that cultural reasons often kept people home in some communities. Thus, despite what would often be considered adequate efforts to attract people to Regional Transit meetings, participation was relatively poor. CAC members and others helped the agency revise its approach to focus on face-to-face communication and on meeting certain groups on their own turf, in their own meetings. The project manager and consultant said ethnic and other CAC members who helped set up meetings and got people to attend were invaluable in improving outreach.
- **providing effective staffing of a project hotline by inclusion of a Spanish-language recording and sys-**




**tematic record-keeping of calls, names, and concerns.** The basic job of staffing and maintaining the hotline became a multi-resource project. The hotline, with a standard message recorded in English and Spanish, gave general information about the project and was followed by a detailed recording about meetings and other activities. The recording was updated constantly, so no one would perceive that the hotline was ignored. Callers leaving messages were called back promptly. Monthly logs included the caller's name, type of call (mailing list only or comments or questions), and action taken. Names were added to the mailing list, and key people were identified as supporters or people with issues to address in the study.

to them and cared enough to research the answer and respond. Names from comment cards were also taken and added to the project mailing list (See Figure 4).

- establishing creative use of comment cards for inclusion in the study and public involvement efforts.** The study's comment card proved to be more than just a way to let people "speak" without speaking at meetings. Prepared in several languages and used at meetings and events, comment cards were considered successful tools to get additional information about peoples' concerns and provided a way to give written responses. Regional Transit received a range of comments this way, from simple support for the project to input into the choice of rail alignment to complaints about the project's cost. Several CAC members were recruited for CAC participation after speaking and filling out a comment card at a scoping session. Because it is fairly unusual to actually get a written response with additional information from an agency after a meeting, comment cards with responses helped show the community that people at Regional Transit were listening

- making organized and thoughtful use of spokespersons and contact lists for media representatives.** Regional Transit issued a list of South Sacramento Transit Alternatives Project spokespersons that included representatives not only from Regional Transit but also from the CAC. There were more CAC members than Regional Transit staff listed! CAC members felt that creating this spokespersons' list and distributing it to media and others showed that Regional Transit had great confidence in the ability of CAC

**Figure 4. Comment card in Spanish.**



**TRANSITO REGIONAL DEL DISTRITO DE SACRAMENTO**  
**Proyecto de Alternativas del Tránsito en sur de Sacramento**

Queremos saber lo que usted piensa...  
 Aquí están mis comentarios:

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*Gracias por sus sugerencias.*

Para mas información sobre el Proyecto de Alternativas en el Sur de Sacramento, incluya su nombre y dirección o escriba:  
**Regional Transit, S.S.T.A.P., P.O. Box 2110, Sacramento, CA 95812-2110**

Linea del Proyecto / 443-4383 • TDD / 321-2806 (para personas con impedimentos auditivos)

NOMBRE \_\_\_\_\_

ORGANIZACION \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECCION \_\_\_\_\_

CIUDAD \_\_\_\_\_ ESTADO \_\_\_\_\_ CODIGO POSTAL \_\_\_\_\_

TELEFONO (Opcional) (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

**Queremos Saber un Poquito de Usted.**

<b>Sexo</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Masculino	<input type="checkbox"/> Femenino
<b>Edad</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 18-24	<input type="checkbox"/> 35-49
	<input type="checkbox"/> 25-34	<input type="checkbox"/> 50 o mas
<b>¿Que distancia viajó para está reunion?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 milla o menos	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 a 5 millas
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 a 3 millas	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 millas o mas
<b>¿Que tipo de transportación usó?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Manejé solo/a	<input type="checkbox"/> Automóvil Personal
	<input type="checkbox"/> Tránsito	<input type="checkbox"/> Colectivo
		<input type="checkbox"/> Otro
<b>¿Es usted un pasajero frecuente de RT?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí	<input type="checkbox"/> No

members to communicate effectively about the project. The fact that CAC members could speak on behalf of the project gave tremendous credibility to the project and the public involvement process and enabled Regional Transit to attend more meetings than would have been possible with just its own staff.

### Evaluation

The material for this case study and evaluation was taken from two major sources. One was analysis conducted by the agency itself and the other was telephone and personal interviews with CAC members, metropolitan planning organization representatives, Regional Transit and consultant staff, and Federal and other officials who identified both positive and negative features. Five months after the public hearing for the draft environmental impact analysis studies, Regional Transit produced a 126-page *Public Participation Program Summary and Evaluation Report* that details the approach, tools, and techniques used in the draft environmental impact analysis studies phase. The document comprehensively reviews what was done and what was considered successful. It also includes suggestions for improvement.



### Agency evaluation

The Regional Transit project manager attributes much of the success of the overall outreach program, and particularly the ethnic outreach, to the CAC. Not only was the composition of the CAC such that good group dynamics took hold and helped get through the technical work, but also most individuals on the CAC responded to their written charge, to “be a liaison to your community,” and all became advocates for light rail and transit in the Sacramento region.

However, a technical advisory committee (TAC)—the other advisory committee formed by Regional Transit and made up of State, local, and Federal agency representatives and institution representatives—was not as successful as the CAC. Regional Transit saw the TAC as having the potential to be a similar outreach mechanism to the agencies and institutions as the CAC. But, according to both the Regional Transit project manager and other observers, for Regional Transit the TAC was a disappointing element of the public involvement process and contrasted greatly with the high energy level of the CAC. Other agencies did not sustain interest in the TAC, and attendance was low at most meetings. The TAC and the CAC met jointly only occasionally, usually at critical points in the study.

Regional Transit did a separate evaluation of the ethnic outreach. It acknowledged that to effectively get people from the Hispanic, Asian, and African-American communities involved requires considerably more effort than with other groups. A Regional Transit consultant suggested that, often, some ethnic groups are either not accustomed to participating in civic affairs, have never been asked to

participate, or feel that government is not going to listen to them or care about their concerns if they do voice an opinion. Some people who are relatively new immigrants to the U.S. have cultural reasons for maintaining distance when it comes to active participation in government or community affairs. Members of the Asian community, particularly the Southeast Asian community, for example, show respect for authority by declining to comment on an issue or get involved in an event at which there could be confrontation or disagreement. Although much was done to try to reach these people, Regional Transit acknowledged it was not as successful as desired.

Regional Transit attempted to break down cultural barriers that might prevent some ethnic groups from getting involved by recruiting leaders from the ethnic communities to serve on the CAC, holding meetings in ethnic communities, and participating in ethnic events. Reaching the communities with the aid of community leaders was successful with some groups but still was not particularly effective with unassimilated Asians. Regional Transit’s report recommends that agencies be willing to go directly to the community where people live, shop, and congregate and undertake greater outreach to ethnic leaders when attendance at key meetings is critical.

### Community perspective

Both CAC members and others concurred that Regional Transit did a tremendous job getting information out about the study, involving key stakeholders early, and using the CAC to work through technical issues and build support and a knowledge base within the communities. Regional Transit created and conducted the CAC, making it virtually immune to criticism that the process was not adequate. According to some CAC members, the CAC was a true liaison to neighborhood associations and business affiliations. Regional Transit and the CAC were able to work so well together in part because the group formed at the very beginning of the environmental studies process was inclusive, met regularly, heard the same technical material from the consultants, became champions for the project and the process, and worked to make it a success.

The CAC advised Regional Transit on technical issues, advocating bigger park-and-ride lots and feeder buses to the light rail stations and also advising Regional Transit on community process and media issues. However, some argued that the CAC was more of a listening body that digested technical information and became educated about transit planning, operations, and funding rather than a true advisory group. The proposed project was not controversial. The preferred mode (light rail) and the preferred alignment (Union Pacific Railroad) were known, and there was general support for the project in the communities and at Regional Transit. These two elements combined meant that the significant public involvement process did not necessarily translate into major changes in the study. Therefore, many saw their role on the CAC primarily as organizers of individual communities, long-term supporters of a new mode, and “investments as spokespeople” for future aspects of the study and project.

CAC members who observed both committees said the TAC had the potential to be as effective an outreach mechanism as the CAC because of the breadth of representation. Some thought the TAC failed to generate and sustain the same interest as the CAC because the TAC was not taken as seriously as the CAC. Some argued that technical concerns raised by the TAC were not addressed in the same manner that CAC issues were addressed. Finally, some felt that the technical review process suffered from a lack of attention and that the CAC process thrived due to massive attention.

The overall ethnic outreach component of the environmental studies public outreach was considered very successful and responsible for generating a tremendous awareness of the study, preventing problems later and letting people know that Regional Transit was conducting an open process. The participation of ethnic organizations on the CAC was instrumental in guiding the process and getting buy-in from a number of other groups, such as the ethnic business groups.

However, some felt that—for certain groups—Regional Transit was unable to draw residents and abutters to meetings or to actively participate, largely for cultural reasons. The Southeast Asian residential community, although it may have increased its general awareness of the South Sacramento Transit Alternatives Project through the multi-lingual fliers and other printed material, did not participate much in the CAC or in other ways. Although Regional Transit attempted to use key community leaders and translated printed material, these recruitment techniques were considered by some key leaders “doing things the American way” and probably would not work for cultural reasons. Some argued that the agency needed to further demonstrate greater cultural sensitivity by putting even more reliance on reaching people through personal, more intimate contact with homogeneous groups on their own turf. Admittedly, this approach may not seem time-efficient or cost-effective in the traditional way of looking at how to reach the greatest number of people in the best way, but it is essential in reaching traditionally underserved people and non-participants.

According to some, however, Regional Transit had a monumental task of having to reach people in a way it has traditionally been best to organize—in small groups—in an age when the sense of community or village is disappearing from cities. Regional Transit found that involving people who have not typically been involved in planning or project development was beneficial, but requires considerably more time, money, and effort than is required for people who have been traditionally involved. Traditional mass communication tools are not effective, so more intensive one-on-one contact in “neutral” places, including locations people go for Federal assistance checks or health care, is needed. There, individual communication by people speaking the same language is necessary and individualized follow-up essential. One caveat is that this requires a big commitment of time and resources and has not been typical in planning efforts in the U.S., and—al-

though Regional Transit went far beyond what was traditionally done—it had not anticipated the extraordinary resources really needed.

Finally, Regional Transit’s use of its available financial and personnel resources enabled it to maximize the outreach effort. The prime contractor, Regional Transit’s marketing staff, and its customer relations manager supplemented the bilingual communications firm. Using internal resources enhanced the outreach program and made better use of the \$289,000, 30-month consultant contract.

## Conclusions



What did this process accomplish? First, several key results of the outreach program can be identified from the research and the interviews:

- **heightened awareness** of the light rail planning project;
- **evaluation and input** throughout the environmental studies process;
- **commitment** of agency and communities; and
- **a base of supporters and resource people** within the community.

In summary, the case study research indicates that Regional Transit understood that **making people aware** of the project was key to preventing problems in the future and gaining acceptance for transportation investment. Making sure many people had general knowledge of the project and its potential benefits was key to getting the City Council, legislators, and the Federal Government to participate. Many projects are suspended because someone who isn’t aware of them complains to an elected official that the planning process is not adequate. Different from public relations or marketing, creating an awareness among those who should care does not involve sales but rather, transferring information and providing the opportunity to respond via telephone, FAX, letter, or in person.

It is clear from those interviewed that opportunities to **evaluate and criticize** the process and the transit alternatives abounded. The CAC meetings were the prime point of contact, but the multitude of community meetings and special events Regional Transit held or participated in gave people a chance to ask questions and register concerns and complaints. Comment cards allowed people to communicate quietly about their issues. The public hearing on the draft environmental impact analysis studies was very well attended and was the official opportunity to comment on the preferred alternative as presented in the document. Although the CAC accepted the final decision, it disagreed with the Regional Transit Board on the alternative to pursue and publicly declared its support for an alternative that was more comprehensive and extended light rail farther south.

Many CAC members in particular thought the public involvement process created intense **commitment** from the agency and the community to the public process and the project. Working together on the CAC and in affected communities helped create a shared sense of ownership of the study and made Regional Transit even more committed to creating an excellent rail line with sure service and good design. Community people spent two years together on the CAC, at community meetings, festivals, writing articles for local newspapers, and wading through technical material. A commitment to the public outreach process and to seeing new transportation improvements flowed naturally from this effort.

Results beyond the process also contributed to building commitment. Several CAC members had little or no knowledge or understanding about the transportation needs or the economic development needs of other areas. Working together on the CAC helped bring about a broader understanding of each others' needs and concerns.

Several key CAC leaders involved in other aspects of the study also stated that one of the most significant outcomes of the public involvement process is that Regional Transit now has a strong group of **supporters** who are knowledgeable, reasonable, and articulate when it comes to transit planning and funding issues. These former CAC members—many of whom are “average Joes,” business leaders, and member of institutions—are credible spokespersons for Regional Transit and transit in the Sacramento region. Former CAC members have written articles and sent videotaped appeals to every Federal legislator for funding support for the South Sacramento line. The process educated thousands about the benefits of transit improvements and gained supporters along the way.

### **Applicability to other projects**

The successful elements of Regional Transit's efforts in the South Sacramento Transit Alternatives Project appear to be easily transferrable to studies and projects. Most of what was done can be done in other cities and towns, because Sacramento's success was due largely to attitude and the ability to see the long-term benefits of getting people involved in a meaningful way. The techniques used, procedures incorporated, and overall approach are not staggeringly innovative—just good work from committed people and a supportive agency.

For example, many studies and projects throughout the country use CACs for input. This technique can be made more effective by using the Sacramento model for a CAC that created a truly representative CAC with ethnic-group involvement from the beginning and empowered its members to become leaders in their own communities and in the city as a whole.

Many studies and projects produce materials but often aren't as effective, because the distribution system is weak. Some people interviewed felt that the Sacramento

approach of finding the perfect location for the materials, identifying someone to “monitor” the supply, and following up made a big difference.

While the ethnic outreach process did not serve to significantly alter the alignment or other key features of the project, Regional Transit found it effective in making a lot of people aware that Regional Transit was planning transportation improvements, letting them know that information about most aspects of the project could be obtained, and building a broad-based constituency for the project. This resulted in many forceful and unified positive voices from many different neighborhoods and organizations at the project's public hearing. This support has carried through the remaining environmental impact analysis studies and preliminary engineering phases and into funding discussions with the Federal Government. Without the support of strong minority groups within the neighborhoods, this project may have very well foundered. It could have easily lacked support from local legislators and languished due to a reluctance to allocate local taxes to construct the project.

### **??? For further information:**

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