Ohio Department of Transportation

TRI STATE TRAILS

Collaborate, Connect, Communicate:

ODOT & Tri-State Trails' Early Partnership and Use of VPI for Mill Creek Triangle Trail

Presenters

Brad Bowers, AICP
Tri-State Trails
Project Manager
brad@tristatetrails.org

- **Provides technical assistance to local governments & community stakeholders on regional trail and bikeway projects in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana**
- **Manages trail feasibility studies, comprehensive trail plans, and funding strategies**
- **Experience coordinating public engagement using a variety of tools and strategies**
- **Frequent commuter cyclist, bringing practical insight to active transportation planning**

Anthony Pankala, PE
ODOT, District 8
Environmental Engineer
Anthony.Pankala@dot.ohio.gov

- **Scopes environmental tasks for LPA and ODOT projects with District 8 (Cincinnati)**
- **Creates, reviews, and coordinates environmental documents per ODOT OES manuals and guidelines**
- **Early adaptor and avid user of Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) and enthusiastic about sharing my knowledge and experience with using PublicInput through ODOT**
- **Passionate about multimodal transportation, public transportation, and ADA accessibility**

Outline

- Background
- Above & Beyond
- 1st Time Experience
- Website Walk-thru
- Benefits
- Lessons Learned

About Tri-State Trails

EXPAND
advocate for connecting and expanding the regional trail and bikeway network

LEARN
collect and maintain data on trails locally

ASSIST
provide technical assistance to local governments and community groups

CONNECT
convene trail planners, managers, advocates, and users to share best practices

PROMOTE
promote and celebrate existing trails in the tri-state

Mill Creek Triangle Trail Feasibility Study

The MCT Feasibility Study is a multi-jurisdictional effort and vision for a 40+ mile regional trail network in central and northern Hamilton County. The trail will connect neighborhoods to the Mill Creek, local business districts, key destinations, and Great Parks' regional greenspaces like Winton Woods, Glenwood Gardens, and Sharon Woods, while also linking to Cincinnati's planned 34-mile CROWN loop. The vision is to create an equitable amenity for both transportation and recreation.

Project Team

TRI STATE TRAILS
connecting what moves us.

→ **Planning and Project Management**

ARCADIS

→ **Engineering Consultant**

Lawhon & Associates, Inc.
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING AND ENGINEERING SERVICES

→ **Environmental Subconsultant**

PROJECT PARTNERS

MILL CREEK TRIANGLE TRAIL

Great Parks

MILL CREEK ALLIANCE
SHIFTING THE CURRENT

Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District

rpc
HAMILTON COUNTY
Regional Planning Commission

FIRST SUBURBS CONSORTIUM OF SOUTHWEST OHIO

CACC
Connecting Active Communities Coalition

City of Sharonville

VILLAGE OF EVENDALE OHIO
GATEWAY TO OPPORTUNITY
EST. 1951

the city of Wyoming
est. 1874

Village of GLENDALE
OHIO
INCORPORATED 1855

Beautiful Woodlawn Ohio

READING
The Crossroads of Opportunity

VILLAGE OF LOCKLAND OHIO

VILLAGE OF ARLINGTON HEIGHTS

VILLAGE OF LINCOLN HEIGHTS
Inc. 1946
OHIO

Springfield Township

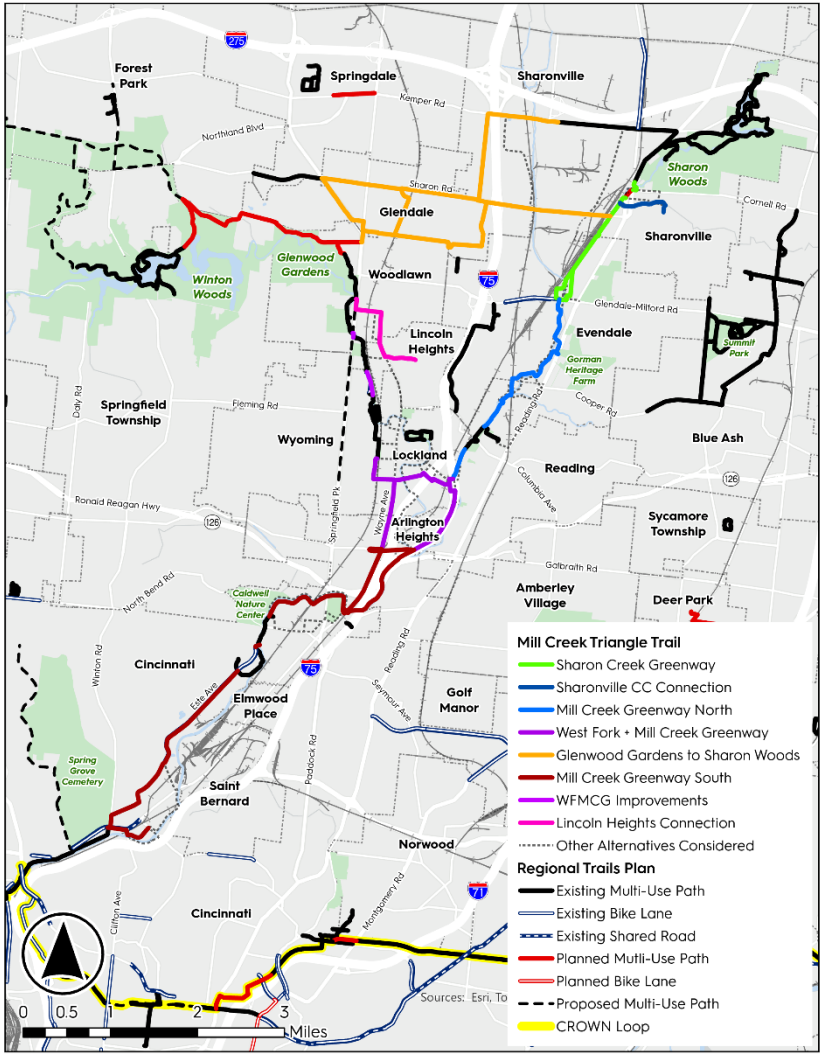
THE CITY OF BLUE ASH
ASPIRE. ACHIEVE. ADVANCE.

We THRIVE!
Community Wellness in Action

WYOMING OHIO CYCLING FOUNDATION

Mill Creek Triangle Trail Feasibility Study Objectives

1. Form an active transportation network in the center of Hamilton County
2. Explore trail alignment options and recommend a preferred route
3. Conduct public engagement for the proposed Mill Creek Triangle Trail
4. Position trail segments to apply for federal and state grant funding for construction



Mill Creek Triangle Trail Overview Map

- Study area includes ten cities and villages
- Steering committee includes reps from each jurisdiction, along with county, state, and regional government agencies, and community organizations
- Working Groups - Study area was broken into six focus areas

Mill Creek Triangle Trail
ODOT Coordination

Original Alignment

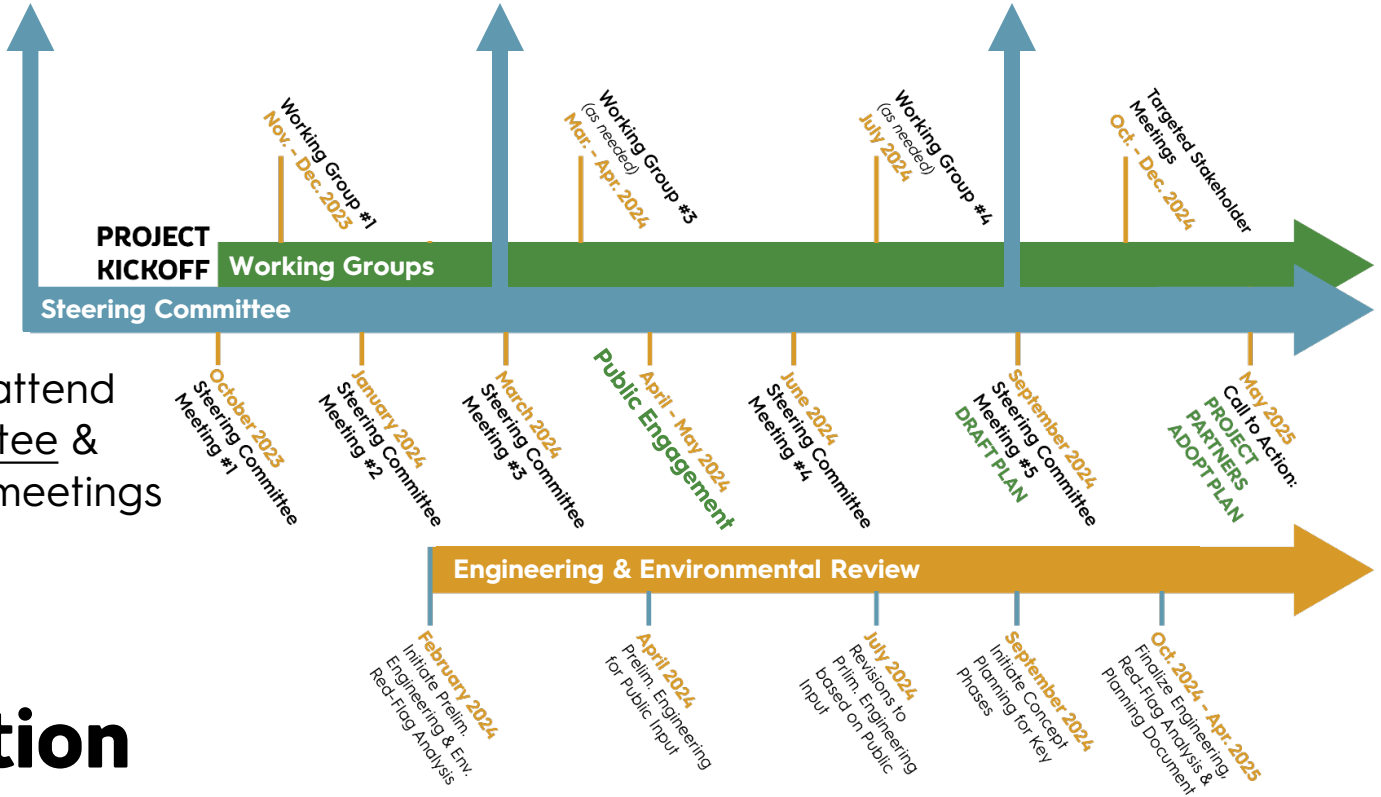
New Unified Alignment
(Alternative 1)

- I-75 Thru-The-Valley Project
- Project Scoping – ODOT Project Development Process (PDP)
- Public Engagement – NEPA Requirements
- Funding Strategy - Setting Mill Creek Triangle Trail segments up for success for future federal funding
- Property Acquisition Strategy

ODOT review of project scope (based on ODOT PDP) and early coordination on planning process

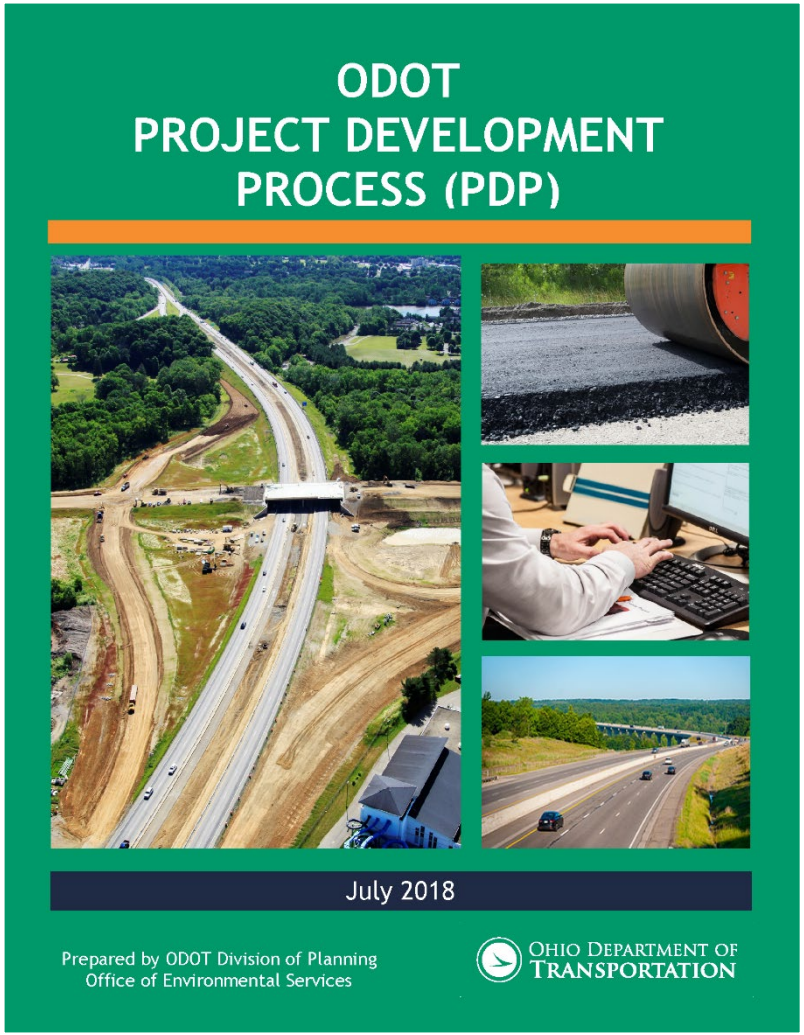
ODOT review of Public Input Plan – TST use of VPI software

ODOT review of draft feasibility study and preliminary engineering



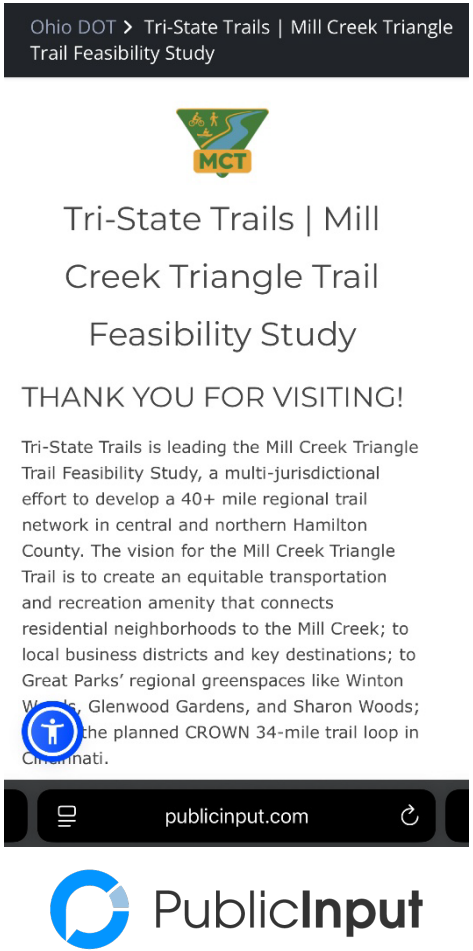
ODOT invited to attend Steering Committee & Public Involvement meetings

ODOT Coordination



Project Scope – PDP

- ODOT review of project scope – assistance in selecting required tasks and appropriate path
- PDP Phases for MCT Study – Planning, Preliminary Engineering, and Environmental Engineering (red-flag analysis)
- Review of Purpose & Need Statement
- Design Standards – ODOT MMDG

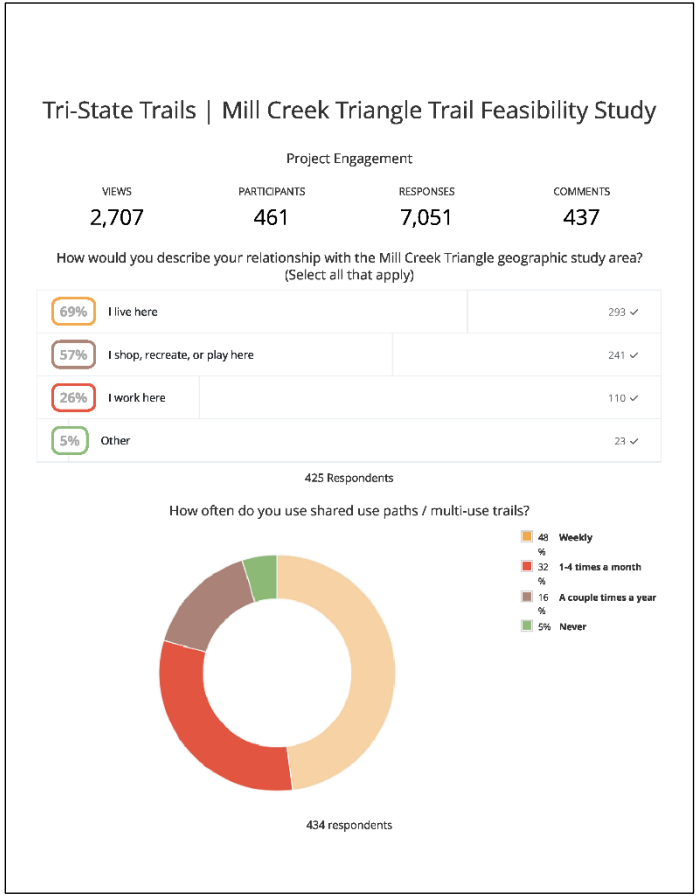


Virtual Public Involvement (VPI)

- Tri-State Trails asked and received access to PublicInput to conduct Virtual Public Involvement (VPI)
- First time use of VPI software to conduct public engagement survey
- Ease of use to create project webpage
- PublicInput training sessions
- ODOT review and "tweaking" of project webpage to be more user-friendly

Benefits of Using VPI

- Survey / questionnaires
  - Ability to share a lot of information (background, alternatives, focus areas, etc.) using website tabs
- Greater participation
  - Easier to ask and get responses at the convenience of each survey respondent
- Allows participants to directly interact with other comments by responding or “upvoting” comments they agree with
- Easy to share with QR codes and social media posts



Benefits of Using VPI

- Mobile friendly version of project webpage
- Built-in reports / analysis functions to present public feedback data to steering committee
- Ability to use templates / language from previous VPI surveys
- PublicInput Vs. other PI software / methods
- ODOT assistance through the process

Challenges of Using VPI

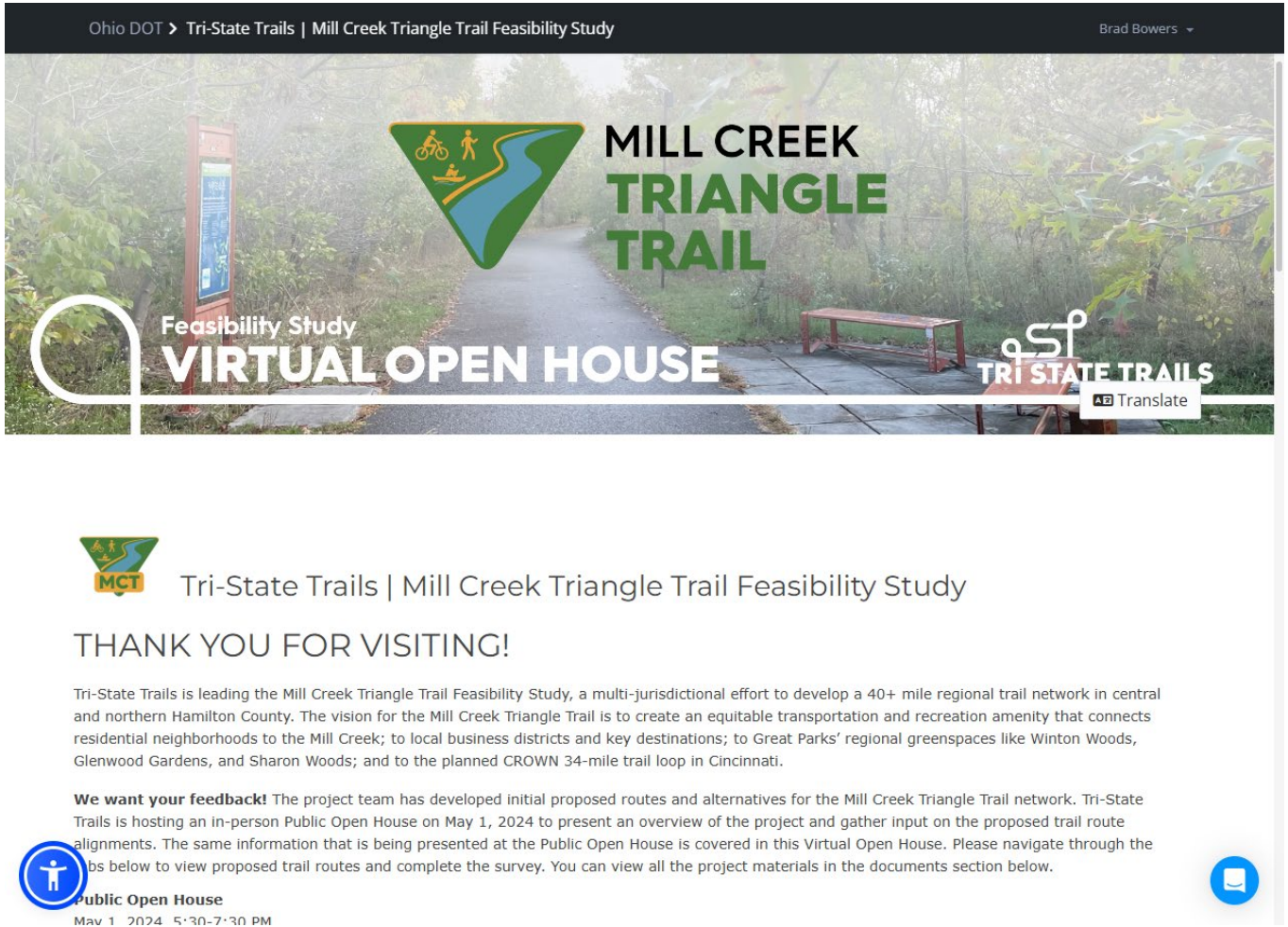
- More data to process
- Moderating responses to clarify project details
- Difficulty integrating paper survey responses from in-person open house

Website Walk-Thru

MCT VPI Site:
https://publicinput.com/k4641

MCT VPI Report:
https://PublicInput.com/Report/gxkvmmd4gkx

MCT Project Website:
https://tristatetrails.org/millcreektriangle/

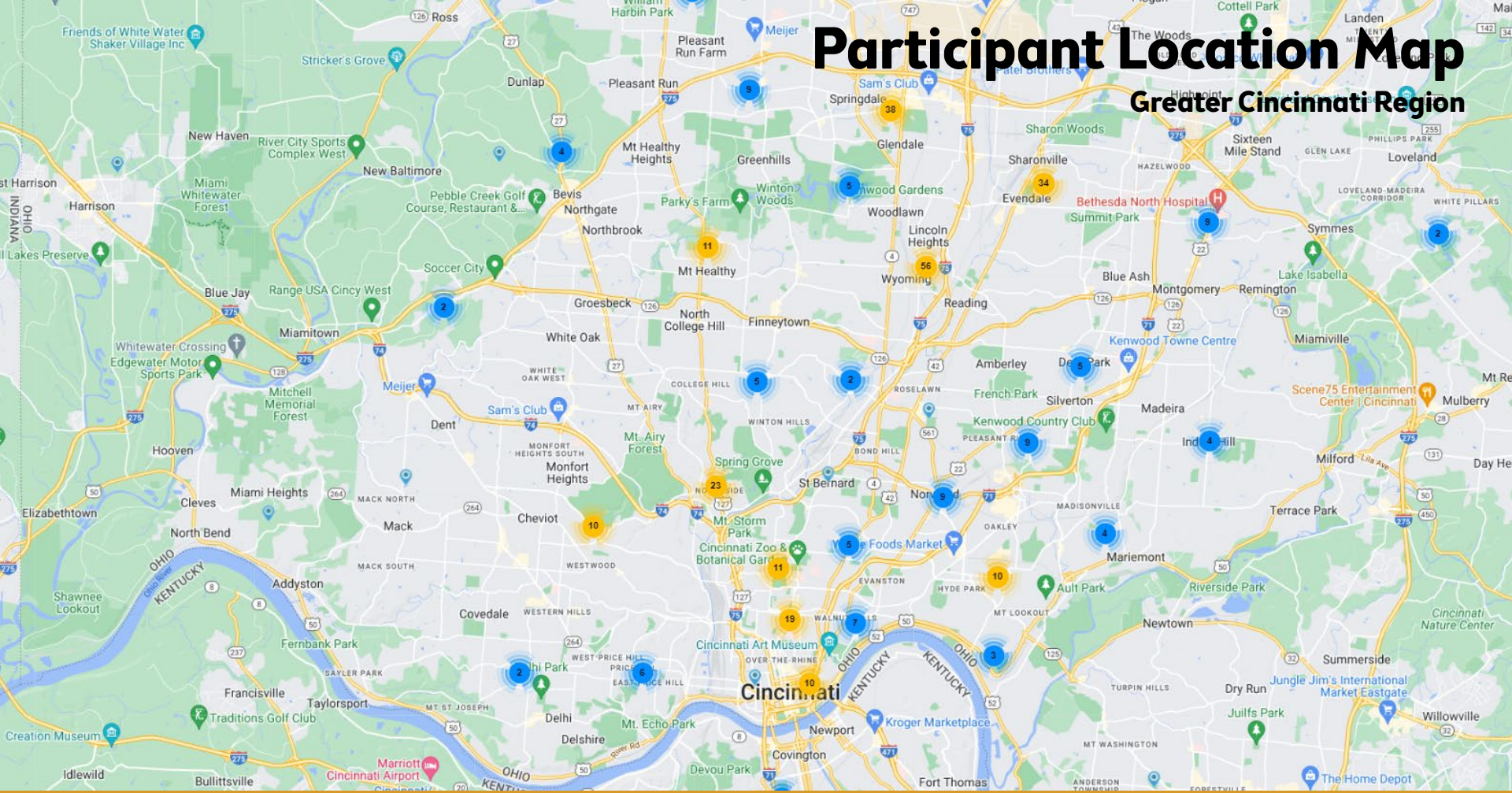


Survey Results

- 5/1/2024 Public Open House: **65-70 attendees**
- Virtual Open House:
  - **2,707 Views**
  - **461 Participants**
  - **437 Comments**

Participant Location Map

Greater Cincinnati Region



Participant Location

383 Responses
Open

If you live within the Mill Creek Triangle geographic study area, please indicate your community. If you live outside the geographic study area, please use the "Other" option to indicate your community.

City of Sharonville	20 participants	5%
Village of Evendale	25 participants	7%
Village of Glendale	56 participants	15%
City of Wyoming	35 participants	9%
Village of Woodlawn	8 participants	2%
City of Reading	20 participants	5%
Village of Lincoln Heights	3 participants	1%
Village of Arlington Heights	4 participants	1%
Village of Lockland	11 participants	3%
Springfield Township	14 participants	4%
City of Cincinnati	101 participants	26%
Village of Greenhills	2 participants	1%
Other	86 participants	22%

Hamilton County	
Village of Glendale	*1*
City of Sharonville	*1*
City of Wyoming	*1*
Village of Greenhills	*1*
Springfield Township	*1*
City of Springdale	**6**
City of Madeira	**4**
Columbia Township	**3**
City of Forest Park	**3**
City of Norwood	**3**
City of Blue Ash	**3**
Sycamore Township	1
Dent	1
Village of Terrace Park	1
City of Harrison	1
Finneytown	1
Green Township	1
Anderson Township	1
Village of Indian Hill	1
Miami Township	1
St. Bernard	1
Colerain Township	1

Butler County	
West Chester Township	**4**
City of Hamilton	**2**
Butler County	1
City of Fairfield	1

Cincinnati Neighborhoods	
Madisonville	**3**
Hyde Park	1
Columbia Tuscalum	1
Pleasant Ridge	1
Westwood	1
Oakley	1
East End	1
Mt. Washington	1
Downtown Cincinnati	1
Sayler Park	1
College Hill	1
Evanston	1
East Side	1

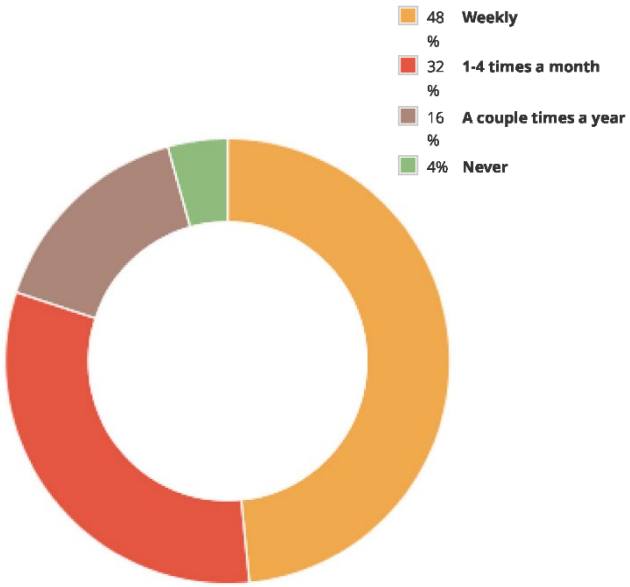
NKY Communities	
Newport	**3**
Covington	**3**
Fort Mitchell	1
Independence	1
Northern Kentucky	1

Clermont County	
Amelia	**2**
Union Township	1

Warren County	
Maineville	1

Shared Use Path Usage

How often do you use shared use paths / multi-use trails?



415 respondents

What type of bicycle facility would you feel comfortable using in the Mill Creek Triangle Trail network? (Select all that apply)

94%	Separated multi-use trails	377 ✓
65%	Protected on-road bicycle lane	260 ✓
24%	On-road bicycle lane	98 ✓
14%	Shared road with signage	55 ✓
3%	I am not comfortable bicycling on any of the listed facilities.	12 ✓

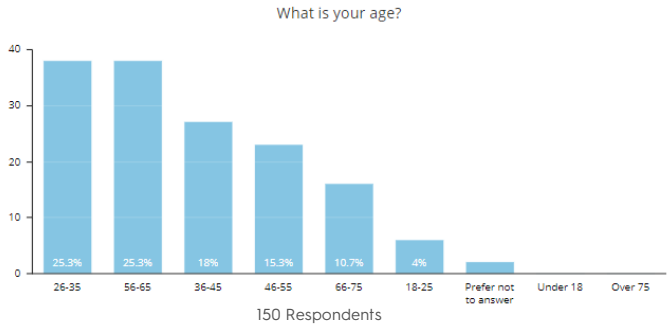
403 Respondents

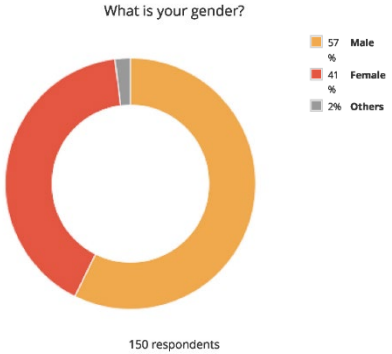
What do you most often use shared use paths / multi-use trails for? (Select all that apply)

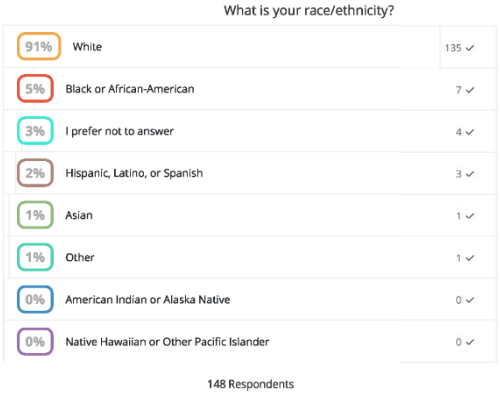
79%	Exercise	321 ✓
61%	For fun	248 ✓
35%	Getting from one place to another	144 ✓
6%	Other	23 ✓

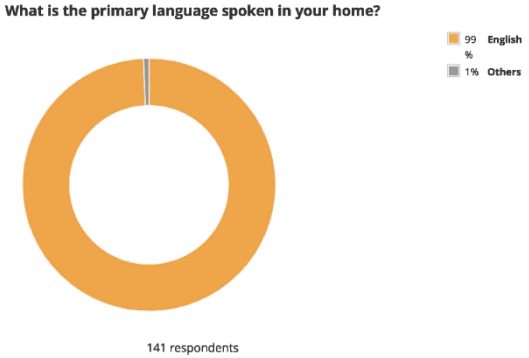
406 Respondents

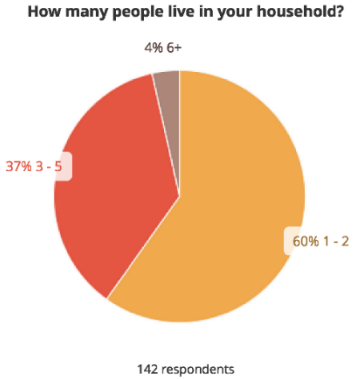
Participant Demographics

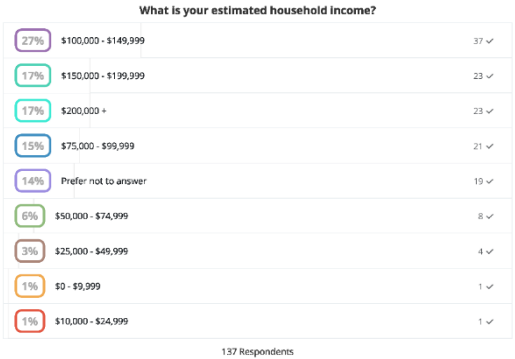




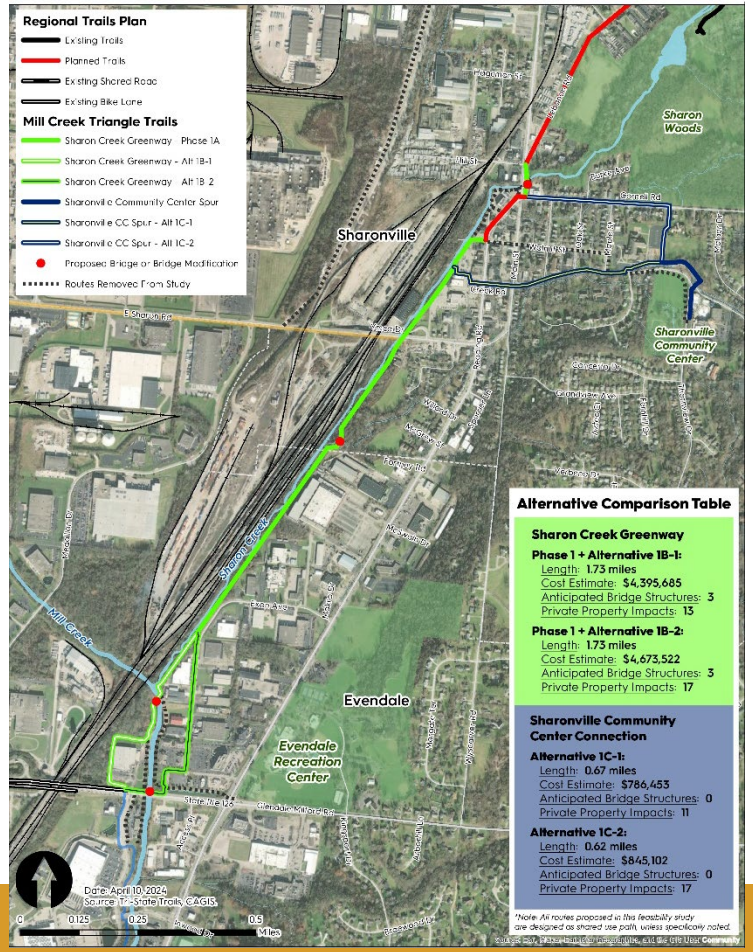




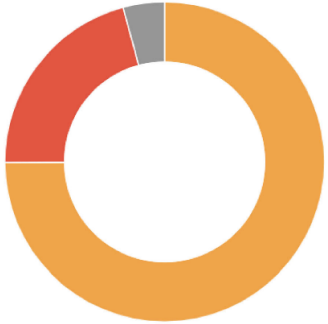




Sharon Creek Greenway Focus Area



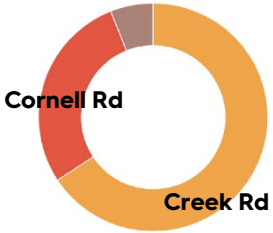
What do you think of the proposed routes in the Sharon Creek Greenway Focus Area?



- 75% I love them!
- 21% I like them, but I have questions or concerns.
- 4% Others

314 Respondents

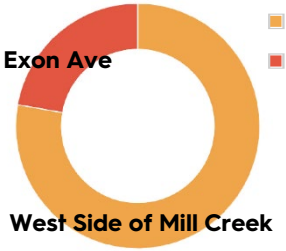
For the **Sharonville Community Center Connection**, which alternative do you prefer?



- 66% Alternative 1C-1
- 28% Alternative 1C-2
- 6% Other

251 Respondents

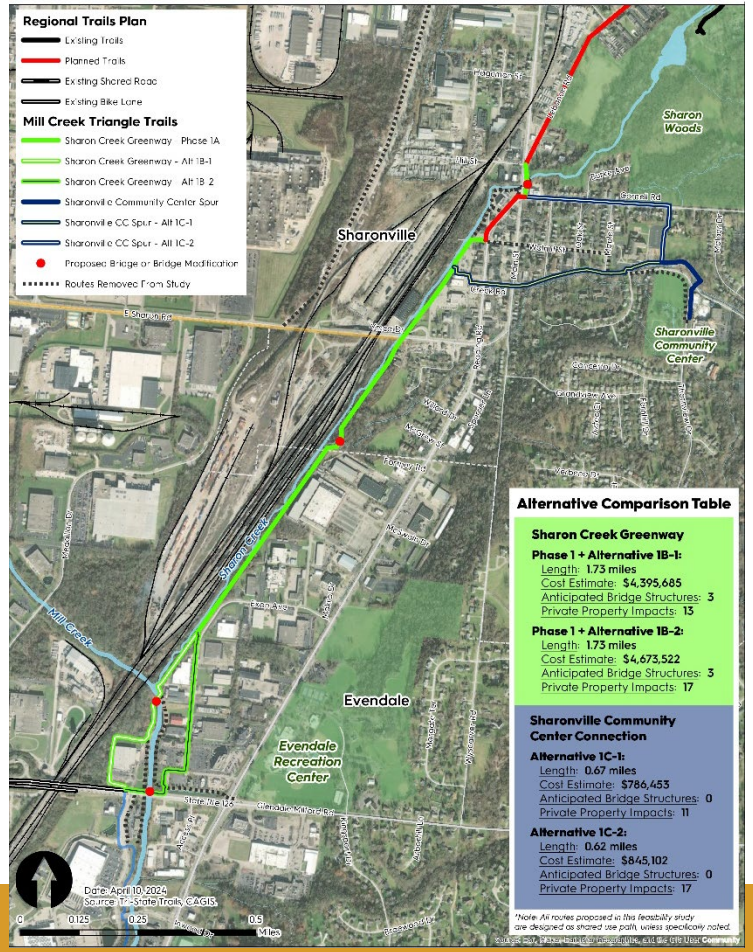
For the **Sharon Creek Greenway**, which alternative do you prefer?

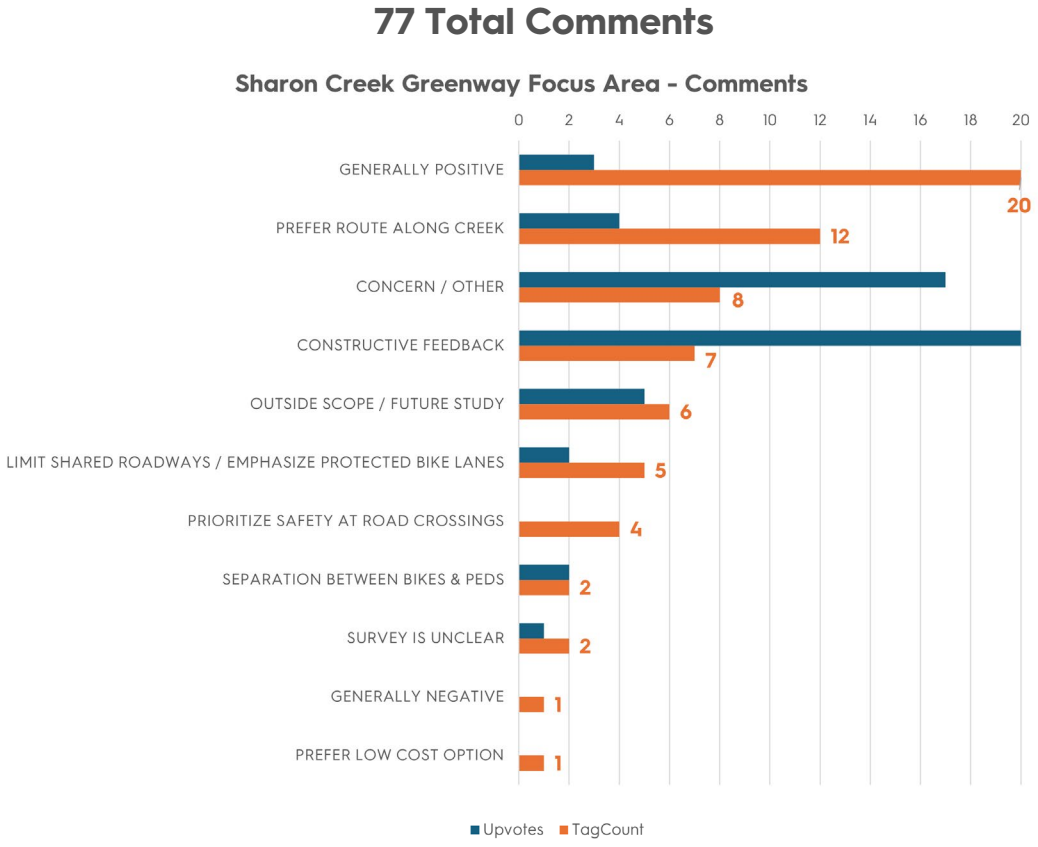


- 78% Phase 1 + Alternative 1B-1
- 22% Phase 1 + Alternative 1B-2

246 Respondents

Sharon Creek Greenway Focus Area





Sharon Creek Greenway Focus Area
KEY TAKEAWAYS

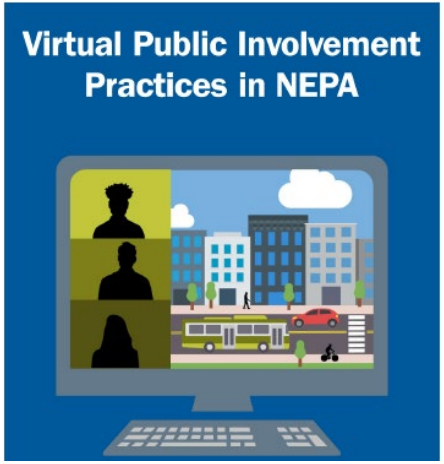
- Keep the trail along the creek
- Prioritize safe roadway crossings
  - Glendale-Milford Rd
  - Reading Rd / Main St in Sharonville
- FUTURE STUDY:
  - Convert Glendale-Milford bike lane protected bike lane
  - Alternative 1-C2 (Cornell Rd) creates an opportunity for trail loop around Sharon Woods trail system
  - Spur trails to Evendale Recreation Center / residential areas

Wins for Tri-State Trails

- Strengthen future funding prospectives
- Strong feasibility study report
  - Constructive feedback from public
  - Clear preferred alternatives to pursue funding
- Demonstrated significant support for the project due to number of residents participating in VPI and voicing support

Wins for ODOT

- Reduced burden for future phases that are constructed
- Strong feasibility study to create better projects to later oversee
  - I.E. all viable alternatives identified and covered
  - PI already identified hot button issues
  - Public input already received
- Smooth transition into an LPA project managed by an ODOT PM



Lessons Learned

Not all VPIs are created equal!

- VPI (Open House) are static websites that are open 24/7 for at least 30 days
- VPI (Live Q&A) aka Zoom PI meetings, have many of the same drawbacks of in-person meetings. Very limited timeframe to try and participate.
- VPI can be low effort and still be highly effective
- It's very rare for the public to complain about not having a "presentation"

Lessons Learned

	Meeting Type	
	VPI (Open House)	In-Person*
Total Comments	398	66

*Assuming every person who attended provided a comment

Location of Participants	VPI Percentage	In-person Percentage	Change in Precentage
City of Sharonville**	5.5	9.1	-3.6
Village of Evendale	7.0	3.0	4.0
Village of Glendale	14.1	12.1	1.9
City of Wyoming	9.3	12.1	-2.8
Village of Woodlawn	2.3	**0.0**	2.3
City of Reading	5.0	3.0	2.0
Village of Lincoln Heights	0.8	**0.0**	0.8
Village of Arlington Heights	1.8	**0.0**	1.8
Village of Lockland	3.3	**0.0**	3.3
Springfield Township	3.5	1.5	2.0
City of Cincinnati	25.4	27.3	-1.9
Village of Greenhills	0.5	1.5	-1.0
Other	21.6	30.3	-8.7
Total	100	100	

**In-person meeting took place within the City of Sharonville so that may explain why the decrease in presentage

VPI (Open House) allows for better representation vs. In-person

- In-person meeting had over representation and under representation of communities.
- VPI actually reduced representation from people who lived outside of the communities impacted by the project.
- VPI allowed for more equal representation weighted by population of communities.
- VPI generates more representation of traditionally underserved communities (low income & minorities).

Lessons Learned

VPI (Open House) allows for better representation vs. In-person

- VPI allowed for more equal representation weighted by populations of communities
- VPI generates more representation of traditionally underserved communities

Location of Participants	Ideal weighted representation	VPI weighted representation	In-person weighted representation	ideal vs VPI	ideal vs in-person	Change in Precent
City of Sharonville	11.3	5.5	9.1	-5.7	-2.2	-3.6
Village of Evendale	2.6	7.0	3.0	4.4	0.4	4.0
Village of Glendale	1.9	14.1	12.1	12.1	10.2	1.9
City of Wyoming	8.6	9.3	12.1	0.7	3.6	-2.8
Village of Woodlawn	3.8	2.3	0.0	-1.6	-3.8	2.3
City of Reading	10.3	5.0	3.0	-5.3	-7.3	2.0
Village of Lincoln Heights	3.1	0.8	0.0	-2.3	-3.1	0.8
Village of Arlington Heights	1.0	1.8	0.0	0.7	-1.0	1.8
Village of Lockland	3.4	3.3	0.0	-0.2	-3.4	3.3
Springfield Township	35.0	3.5	1.5	-31.5	-33.5	2.0
City of Cincinnati*	15.4	25.4	27.3	10.0	11.9	-1.9
Village of Greenhills	3.6	0.5	1.5	-3.1	-2.1	-1.0
Other	0.0	21.6	30.3	21.6	30.3	-8.7

*Cincinnati population is based on Hartwell, Roselawn, & Carthage

VPI helps tranditionally underserved communities get closer to the ideal repensetation when factoring in the populations of residents in all communties.

Lessons Learned

- What to do differently “next time”
  - Projected cost estimates
  - LTAP training – PDP
- Recommendations to other agencies / districts
  - Early coordination with ODOT if you’re planning to pursue federal grant funds

Thank you!

TRI STATE TRAILS

Department of Transportation

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