

Public Engagement Plan – UCAT Route Optimization Plan

Introduction

This engagement plan is part of Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTC) and Ulster County Area Transit’s (UCAT) Route Optimization Plan (ROP). This plan explains how outreach will inform the planning process and identifies opportunities for engagement with stakeholders, employees, and the public that will be woven into the plan development process. It is a living document that may be updated throughout the project to adapt to changes in the project trajectory and schedule.

Public and stakeholder outreach will be conducted throughout the project's development throughout three, distinct outreach phases (along with a preliminary Phase 0). These phases are aligned with specific project tasks to ensure that the feedback will drive the project forward and help to direct the final recommendations. **Figure 1** illustrates how the various phases of engagement interact with the non-engagement planning tasks.

Figure 1 | Relationship Between Planning and Engagement

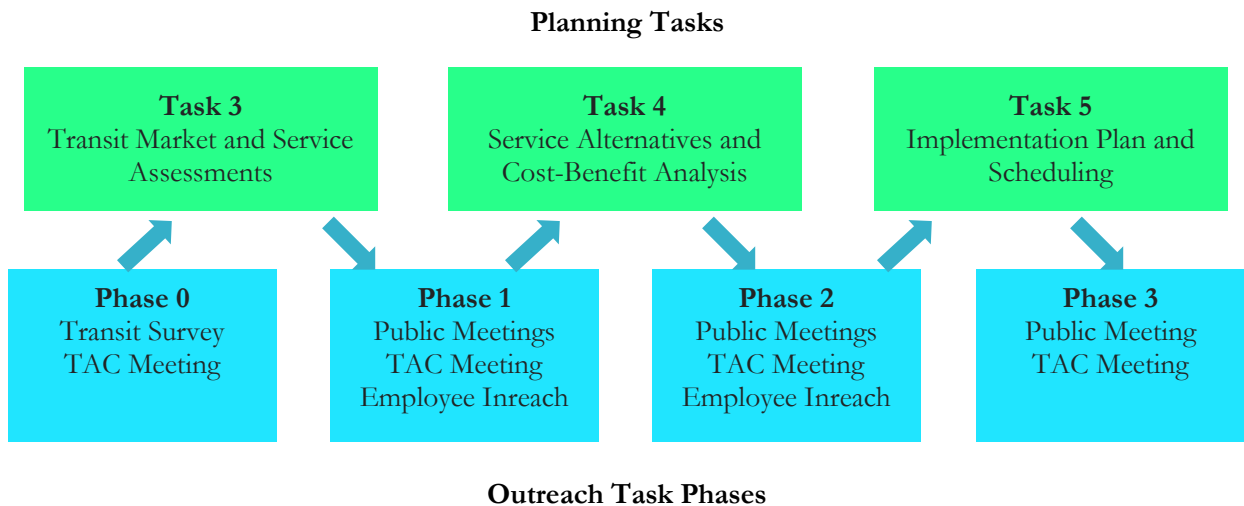
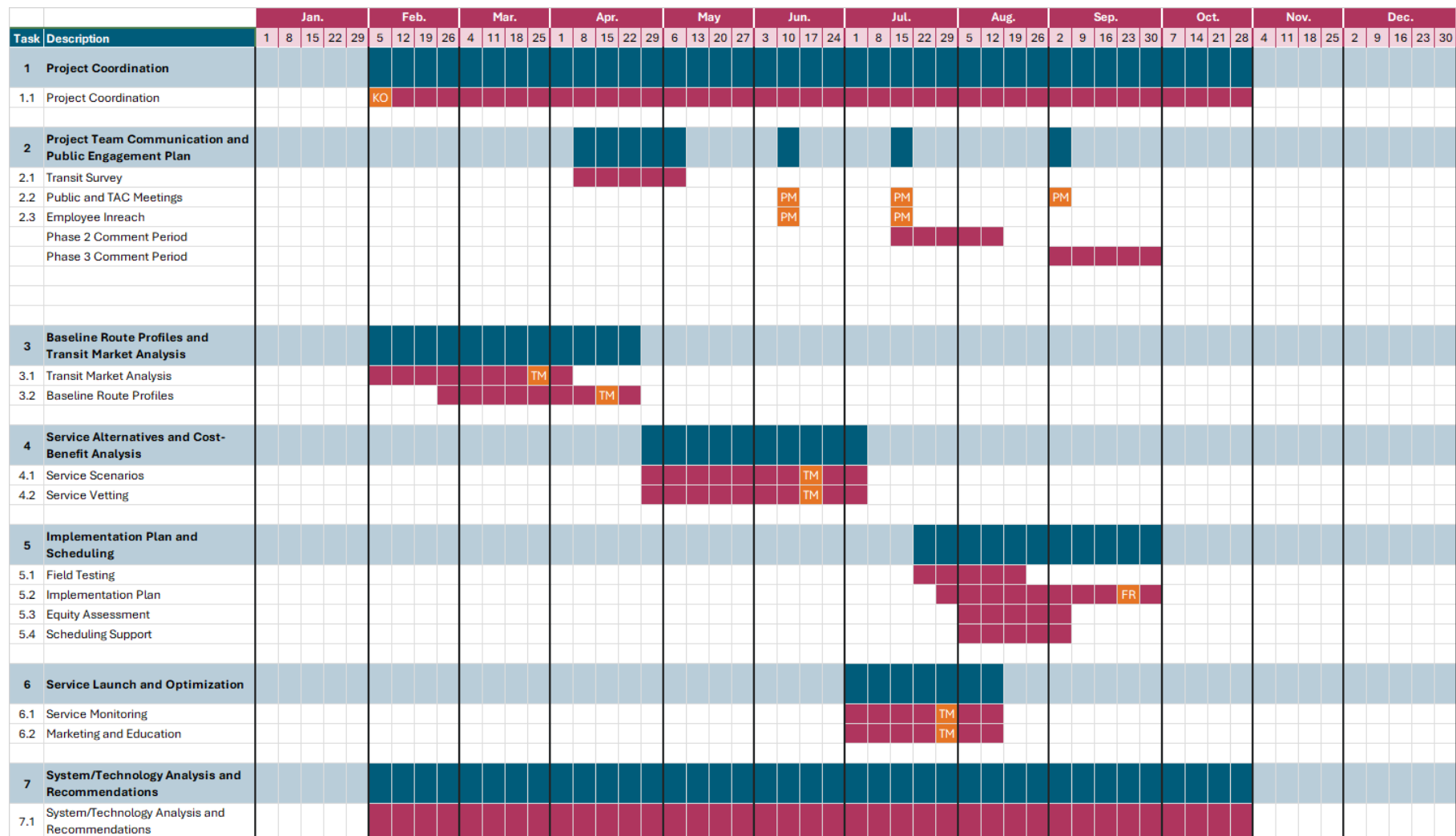


Figure 2 provides an overall planned project schedule and illustrates how various phases of engagement overlap with the other project elements. The schedule may be updated throughout the project to adapt to changes in the project trajectory and schedule.

Figure 2 | Overall Project Timeline



TM = Technical Memo FR = Final Report PM = Public Meeting and/or TAC Meeting

Engagement Goals

Feedback obtained through engagement efforts will be critical to understand the existing opportunities and challenges regarding transit and mobility in Ulster County and to develop recommendations and service scenarios that attempt to address them. Incorporating input from stakeholders and the public is key to the success of any project, as it contextualizes analytics and ensures that project work is grounded in customers' experiences.

The goals for ROP engagement include:

- ▶ Structure and conduct engagement to ensure participation across Ulster County.
- ▶ Schedule TAC meetings at critical times in the project to get direction and move the project forward.
- ▶ Ensure that participants will receive educational and pertinent project information and can in turn provide input that is useful to the project.
- ▶ Use plain language and ensure that ROP messaging is accessible in English and Spanish.

Audiences

Technical Advisory Committee

The project team has formed a technical advisory committee (TAC) comprised of key stakeholders from various public services and entities in Ulster County and neighboring Dutchess and Orange counties. In addition to providing a review of project findings and deliverables outside of engagement, members of the TAC will provide important insight themselves and will be crucial community partners who will share project information and engagement opportunities with the people and communities they represent. **Table 1** lists TAC members and their respective organizations. In addition to the first TAC meeting that was included in part of the project kick-off, the TAC will meet once in each phase of Engagement (additional contact between the project team and TAC may occur when providing deliverables for review or incorporating TAC feedback)

Table 1 | Technical Advisory Committee Members

Ulster County Area Transit (UCAT)	Toni Roser, Director
	Anthony Troccia, Deputy Director
	Scott Workman, Deputy Director – Electrification and Innovation
Ulster County Government (outside of UCAT)	Amanda LaValle, Deputy County Executive
	Esi Lewis, Chief Diversity Officer
	Sharon Williams, Director, Office of Employment and Training
	Vin Martello, Director of Community Relations, Department of Health

Other Government Representatives	Alan Sorenson , Director, Orange County Planning
	Dan Coots , Regional 8 Transit Coordinator, New York State Department of Transportation
	Mark Debald , Program Administrator, Dutchess County Transportation Council
	Neal Bettez , Town Supervisor, Town of New Paltz
Educational Institutions	Eric Fortune-Reader , Student Disability Advocate, SUNY Ulster
	Tatiana Rojas , Bilingual Family Worker, Kingston High School

General Public & Transit Riders

The input of GRTC riders and other members of the public will be key to developing the service recommendations. In addition to a transit survey in the project’s Phase 0, the public will be invited to review and comment on the project status and findings in three rounds of public meetings. When receiving feedback from the general public, distinguishing between existing riders and non-riders is critical to contextualizing feedback and understanding how perceptions and priorities differ between these groups. Engagement centered around existing services (public meetings near transit centers, notifications, and surveys on transit vehicles) is key to reaching captive riders who have limited mobility options.

Transit Employees

Transit employees, particularly bus operators and dispatchers, provide invaluable on-the-ground observations that large datasets may fail to capture. The project team will talk to UCAT operations staff both about the existing system’s strengths and weaknesses and get their feedback on service scenario concepts.

Methods

This section provides a brief overview of the proposed outreach methods for the UCAT Route Optimization Plan. This section describes at a high-level the methods in a general sense; the specific goals for each method in each phase of outreach (such as the goal of TAC Meeting #2) are specified in the next section, Engagement Plan by Phase.

Transit Survey

Among the best ways to determine how to improve transit service is to ask riders, and prospective riders, themselves. The project team will develop a transit survey to assess riders’ perceptions, preferences, and priorities regarding transit service in Ulster County. The survey will be structured to offer a separate set of questions on whether the respondent is a current transit rider or not. While a print version of the survey can be made available, the primary and preferred format will be a digital survey hosted by the project website. A Spanish translation of the survey will also be made available.

For latter phases of engagement, a more open-ended public feedback form will be made available (online and in print).

Technical Advisory Committee Meetings

The project team will host meetings with the TAC either in-person or virtually (depending on circumstances) to provide an overview of the project status and findings to date. Findings will be available in a slide deck and the meeting will be recorded for any TAC members who are unable to attend. Each meeting will include an open discussion period for TAC members to ask questions and/or provide comment.

Public Meetings

Each round of public and stakeholder meetings will include a combination of daytime and evening events to allow for maximum participation of residents with various schedules. Depending on the venue and content, these meetings may include a combination of a presentation and/or display boards. Public meeting locations should prioritize accessibility (particularly via transit, to ensure accessibility for captive riders) and be considered against existing ridership patterns (which communities see the highest density of riders).

Inreach

Concurrent with visits to conduct public meetings, the project team shall set aside time to meet with UCAT operations staff, particularly bus drivers and dispatchers. Drivers and dispatchers are UCAT's front line staff and often the primary point-of-contact between UCAT and the public. They can provide key information about existing service's strengths and weaknesses that is not shown in the data.

Engagement Plan by Phase

Phase 0

TAC MEETING #1

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Introduce the TAC members to the project team (including UCAT, UCTC, and the consultant team).
- ▶ Introduce the TAC to the overall project by discussing the background, project goals, and scope by task.
- ▶ Clarify the roles and expectations of the TAC in the overall project process.
- ▶ Host an open dialogue for TAC members to ask questions about the project scope and approach and provide preliminary feedback and suggestions on specific items to consider.

CONTENT

- ▶ A PowerPoint presentation that covers the project team, background, goals, scope/approach, and tentative schedule.
- ▶ An interactive poll/exercise for the TAC to explore possible new names for the project (to replace "Route Optimization Plan.")

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ This meeting was conducted virtually on February 9, 2024, from 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- ▶ The virtual meeting was hosted by UCTC via Zoom.

Public Engagement - Transit Survey

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Assess the perceptions, preferences, and priorities regarding transit service of existing UCAT riders.
- ▶ Assess the perceptions, preferences, and priorities regarding transit service of non-riders.

- ▶ Among riders, collect survey responses that are representative of the entire system (make sure regular riders of as many routes as possible are represented).
- ▶ Among riders and non-riders, collect survey responses geographically distributed across Ulster County (based on the responders' home location).
- ▶ Provide an opportunity for survey responders to subscribe to an e-mail list regarding project updates.

CONTENT

- ▶ An online survey that asks questions about existing travel behavior, perceptions, and preferences. regarding transit, as well as demographic and economic information.
- ▶ A printed version of the online survey.

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ The survey will be open for a minimum of 30 days (compliant with UCAT's Public Participation Plan requirements).
- ▶ The online survey will be available on the project website (maintained by UCTC).
- ▶ UCTC and UCAT will promote the survey via:
 - ▶ Notice filed with every UCAT municipality office (as required the UCAT PPP).
 - ▶ Flyers/handbill with QR code to promote online survey. The UCTC/UCAT staff will work on distributing these flyers on UCAT vehicles.
- ▶ For residents who aren't comfortable with a digital survey, contact information for UCTC staff will be provided to conduct surveys via phone.
- ▶ Surveys will be available in Spanish and English.
- ▶ TAC members are encouraged to promote the survey via their own channels.
- ▶ Survey will contain an option for respondents to opt-in to project updates/e-mails.
- ▶ SurveyMonkey will be the platform.

Phase 1

TAC Meeting #2

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Present a summary of results to the TAC on the market assessment, service assessment, and transit survey.
- ▶ Solicit TAC feedback on aforementioned items.

CONTENT

- ▶ Slide deck on results of market assessment, service assessment, and transit survey.
- ▶ Draft versions of the technical memos (to be shared after the TAC meeting).

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ This meeting is anticipated to occur in the week of June 11.

Public Meetings

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Introduce the public to the overall project and project goals.
- ▶ Present a summary of the results of the market assessment, service assessment, and transit survey.

CONTENT

- ▶ Slide deck on results of market assessment, service assessment, and transit survey (like what is presented to the TAC), as well as project introduction.

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ UCTC will coordinate securing venues and time slots once general date(s) have been identified.
- ▶ The public meetings will have an in-person and virtual option to maximize coverage.
- ▶ UCTC and UCAT will promote the public meetings through their standard channels and processes.
- ▶ TAC members are encouraged to also promote the meetings through their own networks/channels.
- ▶ E-mail blast to survey respondents to promote the meeting.
- ▶ This meeting is anticipated to occur in the week of June 11.

Employee Interviews

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Introduce the operators to the overall project and project goals.
- ▶ Solicit qualitative operator feedback on operations (to inform technology considerations for Task 7).
- ▶ Collect qualitative feedback on route-specific strengths and weaknesses.

CONTENT

- ▶ Brief PowerPoint presentation to introduce the project.
- ▶ Prepared list of interview questions.
- ▶ Printed 11x17" map of each route to annotate/follow along.

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ Interviews should be held when the break room is busiest (around a shift change)
- ▶ Interviews should be held around the same time as public meetings for travel efficiency.
- ▶ This meeting is anticipated to occur in the week of June 11

Phase 2

TAC Meeting #3

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Provide overview of service planning process to TAC.
- ▶ Present the two service scenarios to the TAC.
- ▶ Collect TAC feedback on the two service scenarios to inform the final recommendations.

CONTENT

- ▶ PowerPoint presentation on service planning fundamentals and service scenarios.
- ▶ Offset map of service scenarios.

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ This meeting is anticipated to occur in early July.

Public Meetings

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Present two service scenarios to the public
- ▶ Collect public feedback on service scenarios.

CONTENT

- ▶ PowerPoint presentation on an overview of the service scenarios
- ▶ Boards with offset maps and descriptions of each scenario (consultant team will design, UCTC will produce).
- ▶ Print/online feedback form (consultant team will design, UCTC will produce).

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ UCTC will coordinate securing venues and time slots once general date(s) have been identified.
- ▶ The public meetings will have an in-person and virtual option to maximize coverage.
- ▶ UCTC and UCAT will promote the public meetings through their standard channels and processes.
- ▶ TAC members are encouraged to also promote the meetings through their own networks/channels.
- ▶ Public feedback form will be available/collected for 30 days.
- ▶ These public meetings are anticipated to occur in early July.

Employee Interviews

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Present two service scenarios to the operators and UCAT staff.
- ▶ Collect staff feedback on service scenarios.

CONTENT

- ▶ Boards with offset maps and descriptions of each scenario.
- ▶ 11x17 print out of each proposed route.
- ▶ Print staff feedback form (consultant team will design, UCTC will produce).

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ Interviews should be held when the break room is busiest (around a shift change)
- ▶ Interviews should be held around the same time as public meetings for travel efficiency.

Phase 3

TAC Meeting

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Present the final recommended scenario to the TAC.
- ▶ Collect TAC feedback on the final recommended scenario.
- ▶ Share findings from Task 6 on service monitoring and marketing/education toolkit.
- ▶ Share findings from Task 7 on technology.

CONTENT

- ▶ Presentation on final recommended scenario, including how the two previous service scenarios informed its development.
- ▶ Offset map of final scenario.
- ▶ Presentation on Task 6 and Task 7 findings.

Logistics and Timeline

- ▶ This meeting is anticipated to occur in mid-to-late August.

Public Meetings

PURPOSE AND GOALS

- ▶ Present the final recommended scenario to the public.
- ▶ Collect final comments on the final scenario.
- ▶ Provide an overview of next steps towards implementing the scenario.

CONTENT

- ▶ Presentation on the final recommended scenario, including how the two previous service scenarios informed its development.
- ▶ Offset map of final scenario.
- ▶ Presentation on next steps and timeline towards implementation.
- ▶ Print/online feedback form (consultant team will design, UCTC will produce).

LOGISTICS AND TIMELINE

- ▶ These meetings are anticipated to occur in early September.
- ▶ The public meetings will have an in-person and virtual option to maximize coverage.
- ▶ UCTC will coordinate securing venues and time slots once general date(s) have been identified.
- ▶ UCTC and UCAT will promote the public meetings through their standard channels and processes.
- ▶ TAC members are encouraged to also promote the meetings through their own networks/channels.
- ▶ Public feedback form will be available/collected for 30 days.

Process Summary

This diagram illustrates how the content from the project feeds into each phase of outreach. Green boxes indicate analysis/content from other non-outreach tasks, while blue boxes indicate outreach events.

Figure 3 | Overall Summary of Public Engagement

