

SECTION 6.1 – COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INPUT

Spokane Transit Authority strives to conduct its business and provide its services in a transparent, accountable, fair, and non-discriminatory manner. To ensure compliance with Title VI during major changes (such as service reductions or fare increases), an analysis is conducted to verify that no discrimination to protected classes occurs. This commitment is included under 1.8 (“Title VI Reporting”) on Page 41 of this section.

Communications and Public Input

As a public agency, Spokane Transit Authority believes that proper communications and public input is of the highest importance. To ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness, STA must use a broad range of communication tools to reach as many people as possible. As technology improves, the amount of information available and the speed at which it can reach those interested increases daily, creating both opportunities and challenges. Fortunately, STA is able to utilize a variety of communications tools to both inform and gather information. The following list is not intended to be a complete list of communications tools which may be used but a sample of some strategies that STA may use for a variety of purposes.

Outreach Tool	Definition
Public Hearing	A meeting during which public testimony may be heard and formal action may be taken on any measure before the STA board of directors
Legal Notice	Public posting or advertising in newspapers to announce a legal action or intent
Display Ads in Newspaper	Paid advertisement in the newspaper to alert readers about an upcoming event or action
Website/Online Social Media	Updates to the website and social media are quick and efficient ways of getting notice to the public quickly
Mobile Device Alerts	Real-time information can alert customers to important real-time information
Signs	Signs on buses, at stop locations, and at transit centers can help to reach people who use transit services
Rider Alerts	Notifications of route, frequency, or other information that is of particular interest to riders
Direct Mailings	Mail sent to an affected group or area to educate, notify, or request input
Workshops/Open Houses/Town Halls	Types of meetings where staff and public interact and discuss various issues
Surveys (scientific and self-selected)	Surveying opinions and ideas can help public agencies understand how to better serve the constituency
On-board Information	Pamphlets and posters that alert riders to information
Displays at Transit Centers	Permanent or temporary displays at transit centers are able to reach a large number of system riders
SEPA	The public outreach requirements of Washington State's State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA) can be an effective tool for communicating with the public about proposed actions

Communications and Public Input Goal

STA will promote openness, honesty, and fairness through appropriate public outreach efforts.

Communications and Public Input Principles

These principles describe the foundation for the policies found in this element:

1. Continuous Communication

Open, honest, early, and continuous communication with all stakeholders increases public confidence in STA.

Changes in STA's operations impact many stakeholders, both within and outside of the agency. For this reason, care should be taken to ensure all stakeholders are identified and remain well-informed.

2. Accountable

A public account of decisions made and responses to public input regarding these decisions increases STA's accountability to its customers.

Thorough recordkeeping helps to ensure a common understanding of decisions, policies, and responses. Sharing records with the public demonstrates the transparency with which STA conducts its business.

3. Accessible Information

Providing access and non-technical explanations of relevant reports, records, and documents demonstrates STA's commitment to transparency.

STA conducts its business in a fair, honest, and legal manner. For that reason, providing access to relevant documents broadens the public's perception of STA's high operating standards.

4. Two-way Communications

Consideration of the views of regulators, stakeholders, and the general public in making decisions demonstrates STA's commitment to fairness and equity.

Transit agencies exist to serve the community. To that end, community members have the right to share their views regarding transit service.

5. Timely

The provision of sufficient time for full public participation, including advance notice of activities and steps in the public process, demonstrates fairness and respect.

Scheduling events and the overall public process with an appreciation of today's busy lifestyles allows for the broadest public participation process possible.

6. Purposeful

Questions pertinent to issues under consideration should be answered by knowledgeable staff.

One can appreciate the frustration stemming from poorly-answered questions. Providing complete, accurate information increases the public's confidence in STA.

Communications and Public Input Policies

CI-1.0 – Public Outreach

The following policies are intended to serve as a guide describing public outreach/input requirements for each action. In cases where there are federal or state requirements for public outreach/input, STA will meet the minimum requirements. In cases where STA has requirements in addition to those defined by the state or federal government, STA will follow both.

1.1 Service Changes

In addition to following Federal Transit Administration guidelines for public outreach for service reductions, STA will also comply with the policy found in the following table.

How to read the following table:

- 1) Determine cost and ridership impacts.
- 2) Consider exceptions.
- 3) The more severe cost or ridership impact determines the category (ex. Cost impacts fall into Category II but ridership impacts fall into Category I, follow the decision making and input/outreach process of Category II)

Any fixed-route adjustment or elimination which would change the paratransit boundary enough to eliminate service from at least one active customer* will trigger a Category II process.

**Active customer is someone who has used paratransit services within a year of the public hearing date.*

			Public Input Categories		
			I-Minor	II-Moderate	III-Major
Cost Impacts	OR	Less than 1.0% growth or reduction in revenue hours of service in any calendar year	1.0% up to 5.0% growth or reduction in revenue hours of service in any calendar year	More than 5.0% reduction in revenue hours of service in any calendar year	
		OR	.5% up to 5.0% of annualized system ridership negatively impacted by loss of bus stop, trips or route at any given service change	OR	5% or more of annualized system ridership negatively impacted by loss of bus stop(s), trip(s) or route(s) at any given service change
Ridership Impacts	OR	Less than .5% of annualized system ridership negatively impacted by loss of bus stop, trips or route at any given service change	.5% up to 5.0% of annualized system ridership negatively impacted by loss of bus stop, trips or route at any given service change	OR	5% or more of annualized system ridership negatively impacted by loss of bus stop(s), trip(s) or route(s) at any given service change
Exceptions	OR	Construction-related or emergency changes necessary for a period not exceeding 180 days for changes that would otherwise be moderate or major	Changes that would normally be classified as minor changes, but require a higher classification because of significant public interest or board involvement	None	
Input and Outreach	OR	Employee and customer input, etc. Documented informal outreach for feedback on changes; may include survey or other tools	Outreach activities including driver and rider input, surveys, meetings with community groups, or other tools. Report to Board on activities.	Public Outreach Plan approved by Board in advance of outreach, which may include outreach to affected community groups, employers, etc.	
Decision Making Process	OR	CEO or designee; staff report detailing changes submitted to the Board at least 50 days prior to changes enacted (except for exceptions that are reported at least 30 days after)	Public hearing prior to Operations Committee and Board action.	At least one public hearing. Board action following Operations Committee recommendation with Title VI report.	
Examples	OR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running time adjustments • Departure time adjustments • Minor bus reroutes • Changes to bus stop locations (Per CI 1.4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant route changes • Addition or deletion of service to a large area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large service reduction • A restructure of the network 	

1.3 Grants

Grant Condition	Public Process
Grants in Capital Improvement Program (CIP)	Adoption of CIP will serve as the public process
Grants applications less than \$1 million*	Notice on STA's website
Grants applications at least \$1 million*	Adoption by Board of Directors

*If grant application project is not contained in the Capital Improvement Program

1.4 Stop Changes

If the cumulative stop changes that take place within a calendar year affect the boardings of 10% of the route's annual ridership, STA will use the tools described in the beginning of this element to gather public input before a final decision is made.

A stop serves as the point at which a rider can access the transit service. The placement of this access is important for the rider, driver, and riders already on board. STA is continually evaluating stop locations along all transit routes by considering safety, stop spacing, and proximity to destinations.

1.5 Transit Development Plan

STA will hold at least one public hearing while developing its program for each annual update.

As a public transportation benefit area authority in Washington State, STA is required to prepare a six-year transit development plan and annual report. This document provides updated information to the Washington State Department of Transportation on the various activities of STA.

1.6 Comprehensive Plan

STA will undertake public outreach efforts for subsequent updates to the Comprehensive Plan and allow an opportunity for public testimony prior to any substantive amendments.

Any change which affects the substance of the Comprehensive Plan will require a public hearing and supporting public outreach.

1.7 Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)

The DBE goals will be available on STA's website for no less than 15 days prior to adoption by the Board.

1.8 Title VI Reporting

During major service reductions and fare increases, STA will conduct an analysis to verify that no discrimination to protected classes takes place.

Title VI provides that "no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

1.9 Major Capital Projects

During the annual Capital Improvement Program (See System Infrastructure Policy 4.0) update process, which identifies all major capital projects, appropriate public outreach and a public hearing shall take place prior to adoption. Amendments to the Capital Improvement Program will follow a similar process.

Any capital project requiring board approval and outside of the normal budgeting process shall be subject to a public hearing to receive public input and testimony.

1.10 Alternatives Analysis Public Outreach

During any Alternatives Analysis, STA or a hired consultant will develop a public outreach plan to both gather input and provide information about the project being evaluated.

1.11 Budget

STA shall hold at least one public hearing prior to the adoption of the annual budget.

Each year the Board of Directors adopts an annual budget that outlines how the agency intends to spend tax, fare, grant and advertising monies.

1.12 NEPA/SEPA/Environmental outreach

Where appropriate or required, STA shall incorporate public outreach and SEPA and NEPA evaluations, with the intent to exceed minimum requirements.

CI-2.0 – Service Communication

2.1 Branding

All branding shall be part of a coordinated system-wide branding plan developed to better the customer experience.

Effective branding can help the customer by conveying simple messages about frequency, span, destinations, and connectivity. By creating a larger branding plan, STA will be consistent with branding styles and purposes.

2.2 Technology

Use improving technology to increase the amount of ridership information available to customers.

By using new and existing technologies, STA can increase ridership by creating a more pleasant experience for transit riders. Technology can decrease wait time, improve decisions about mode choice, increase safety, etc.

2.3 Public Education

Invest resources in educating existing and potential customers about travel options.

STA offers a variety of transportation services (i.e. fixed-route, paratransit, rideshare) that assist in providing solutions to many different customer needs. By investing in education, STA can help customers ensure that they are best utilizing the transportation services which STA provides.

Communications and Public Input Connect Strategies

Improve Customer Information

Invest in technology and strategies which are able to provide customers with real-time information.

Customers are constantly looking for the most up to date information available. Whether wanting to know when a bus will arrive, or wondering if their route is on snow detour, real time information plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of the transit services provided by STA. Strongly pursuing these technologies will position STA to provide more efficient services for customers.