

# Measure of Effectiveness

**Measuring Public Participation Engagement**

**Old Colony Planning Council**

**70 School Street Brockton MA 02301**

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## **Introduction**

Public Participation is a key ingredient in the Old Colony Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) transportation planning efforts. Public Participation not only leads to better projects, studies, and outcomes, but also helps spend limited funding in a manner in line with community and regional goals. In addition to helping develop better projects, public outreach fosters greater trust between citizens and Local, State, and the Federal Government and their representative entities like the Old Colony MPO. Lastly, the MPO is required by State and Federal partners to ensure it is including members of the public in the transportation planning process.

In order to make sure the Old Colony MPO is meeting its public participation requirements, there must be a way for the MPO to measure how its Public Participation Plan (PPP) is accomplishing this goal. Through a series of data collection efforts that take place during outreach efforts, the MPO gets the ability to see where the PPP is succeeding and where there are opportunities for greater participation. This report explores outreach efforts and measures their effectiveness in getting greater public participation by members of the public and outside organizations in MPO planning activities.

## **Measuring Public Participation**

In order to help us better understand how we are doing in meeting our commitment to fostering public engagement in all MPO planning activities, it is key to have a series of measurements to better understand the effectiveness of the public outreach efforts. It is through the tracking of public engagements, whether it be in person, via email, through social media or utilizing virtual public engagement, that the MPO can determine if its public outreach efforts are delivering the results that are desired and required.

## **Evaluation of Outreach Efforts**

The Old Colony MPO tracks all the outreach efforts it conducts. Public meeting attendance is recorded with additional attention given to attendees that are from Title VI protected classes. The MPO tracks the methods it employs in getting information to the public on upcoming meetings, the release of public documents, and the viewing and engagement of the public through its social media presence. Through the collection of this information the MPO gains greater clarity on where it is doing well and where there might need to be a push to increase public engagement. The items tracked are known as Measures of Effectiveness (MOE). The MOEs are listed below.

### Measures of Effectiveness (MOE)

- Meeting attendance
- Number of LEP/Title VI protect class encounters
- Number of documents translated into the four LEP safe harbor clause languages
- Number of direct engagements with outside organizations

- Number of correspondence (social media, direct mailings, email, etc....)

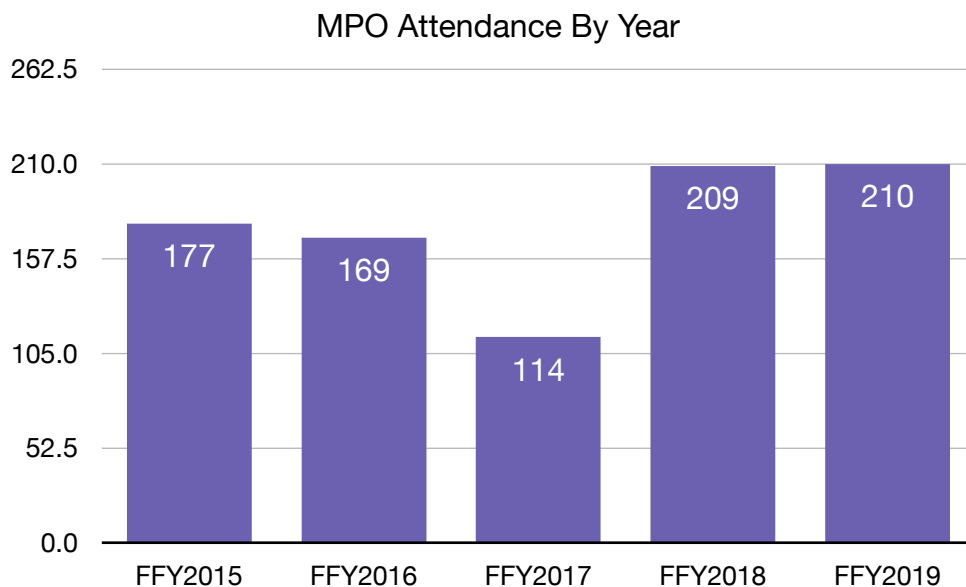
## Engagement Overall

The Old Colony MPO engages in a number of public outreaches each year. Last year in 2019, OCPC either participated in or hosted a total of 145 outreach engagements. Some of these engagements were public meetings for projects or initiatives. Other encounters were direct engagement activities with outside organizations or participation in other organizations meetings or events to bring greater attention to the role of the MPO. The MPO also hosts a series of recurring public meetings throughout the year. These two reoccurring meeting are the Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting and the Joint Transportation Committee meeting, both of which take place multiple times throughout the year.

## Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meetings

The Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting is where transportation policy decisions are discussed and the Transportation Improvement Program's (TIP) list of projects are reviewed. The Old Colony MPO hosts on average of eight (8) MPO meetings throughout the year with an average attendance of 24 persons per meeting during FFY2019. Total attendance at MPO meetings has increased for the past five years by 18.6% when we compare FFY2019 to FFY2015.

Correspondence from the MPO is multifaceted. On average there are 200 direct mailers containing meeting information and agenda. Thirty (30) agendas are printed and distributed on

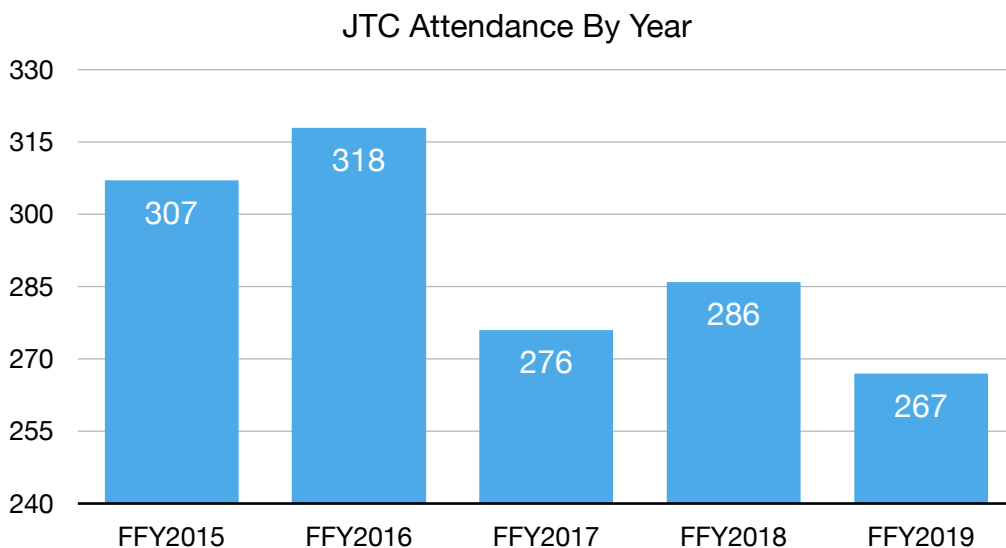


the day of the meeting for those who choose to attend in person. Meeting information and agenda are also emailed to 346 individuals or organizations on the Old Colony MPO's contact list. These emailings are down from 2019 due to a recent data scrubbing of our email contact list for those who may no longer be with an organization and for organizations no longer in operation.

## Joint Transportation Committee (JTC)

The Old Colony Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) is an advisory committee to the Old Colony MPO. The JTC is a venue where the public can be involved in the scheduling of transportation projects to better utilize limited funding. These meetings tend to happen monthly with an average of 10 meetings per year. The average JTC meeting attendance is around 29 individuals. For the last five (5) years, the number of total yearly attendance has been falling. Some of the decline can be contributed to weather events canceling JTC meetings and there may be other contributing factors unbeknownst to the MPO, such as work/meeting schedule conflicts or other personal time constraints that keep members of the public from attending.

Like the MPO, correspondence sent out to the public covering JTC meetings and the topics to



be discussed is multifaceted as well. On average there are 200 direct mailers containing meeting information and agenda. Thirty (30) agendas are also printed and distributed on the day of the meeting for those attending in person. Meeting information and agenda are also emailed to 346 individuals or organizations on the Old Colony MPO's contact list. These emailings are down from 2019 like the MPO because JTC shares the same email contact list.

## External Engagement

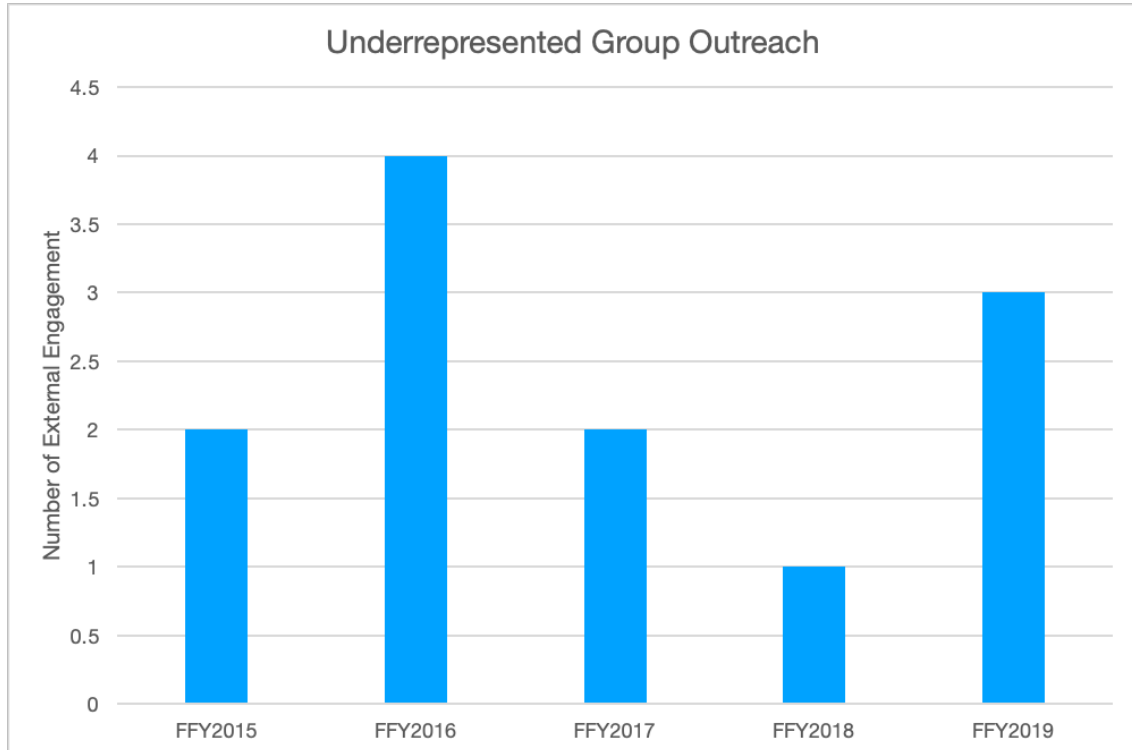
Over the course of a year, the Old Colony MPO engages members of the region on a number of different planning initiatives. Some of these initiatives are studies for the Brockton Area Transit Authority (BAT) and Corridor Studies for communities to name a few. With such planning studies, public engagement is necessary to understand how the public feels about a project or initiative. Last year in 2019, OCPC conducted 127 external public engagement activities. These

engagements ranged from community meeting at public libraries where individuals could go to hear and participate in the planning process for a specific project. Other outreach activities were more direct. For example, during the Brockton Main Street Corridor Study, OCPC met directly with business associations like Brockton's Downtown Business Association and the Campello Business Association and was invited to speak at two Brockton ward meetings. When comparing the number of engagements over the last five years, it is evident that the number of public outreach engagements fluctuates from year to year. This fluctuation in engagements is a result of the fluctuates in the number of projects and initiatives the Old Colony MPO is involved in within a given year. For example, the number of external public engagements in FFY2018 is high because outreach for the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) began that year, and with that there was an increase in several external engagements taking place to grow public interest and participation in the plan.

## **Engagement of Protected Classes**

The MPO takes every effort to make sure individuals that come from traditionally underserved communities are a major part of the public participation processes. All public outreach event notices are translated into the four Limited English Proficiency (LEP) languages for the MPO's region using the Title VI Safe Harbor Clause. These four languages identified using the Safe Harbor Clause would be: Haitian Creole, Spanish, Portuguese and English. Just this year alone, the MPO handed out 28 pieces of outreach material during public outreach events. During the Brockton Main Street Study, multiple public outreach reach events were held to provide public information and garner public input on the project. At two outreach events for the Brockton Main Street Study, 11 handouts were distributed in Spanish and 17 handouts were disturbed in Portuguese.

In addition to translating documents and notices for LEP individuals, the MPO also takes the public engagement process directly to those of the underserved community. Over the course of the last five years, public outreach engagement that was fielded directly at members of the underserved community has risen and fallen due to particular projects and initiatives the MPO was working on. In any typical year the MPO engages two to four underrepresented group organizations to spur public engagement by their member community. Conducting direct engagement with underrepresented group organizations is something the MPO is seeking to do more of as it yields more interest in the studies and projects the MPO has taken on by members of underrepresented communities.



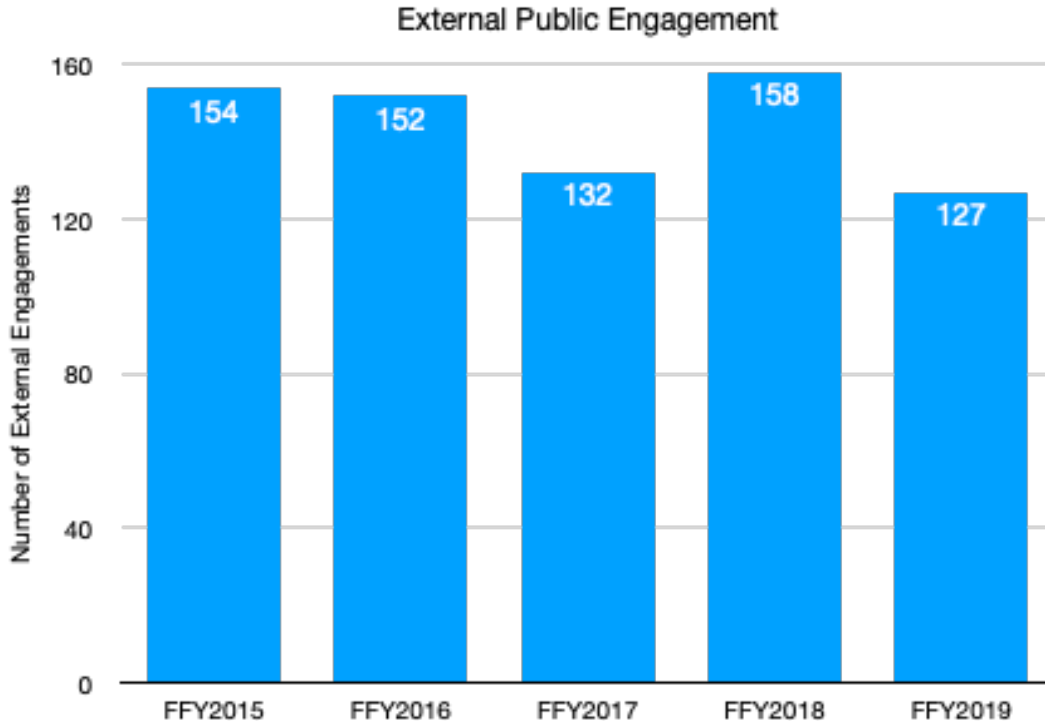
## Correspondence

The Old Colony MPO utilizes several different media to communicate with members of the public about current planning invites, upcoming outreach events and the release of public documents for a period of review and comment. The methods of correspondence span a wide range, from the more traditional like mailers to the modern such as Facebook and Twitter. As times have changed, the MPO relying more on social media platforms to engage members of the public and is always looking for new tools to keep the public engaged. For example, all public meetings like the MPO meeting and the JTC meeting notices are published on OCPC Facebook page and Twitter.

### Traditional

The MPO continues to use the tried and true methods of reaching the public to encourage them to attend outreach events and participate in the planning process. These traditional methods include the mailing of agendas to public officials and posting flyers at town halls and public libraries. Every year the MPO mails out hundreds of meeting notifications and agendas. Taking the case of the MPO and JTC meetings alone, there is a total of 3600 direct mailings for just these two meetings in 2019.





**Digital**

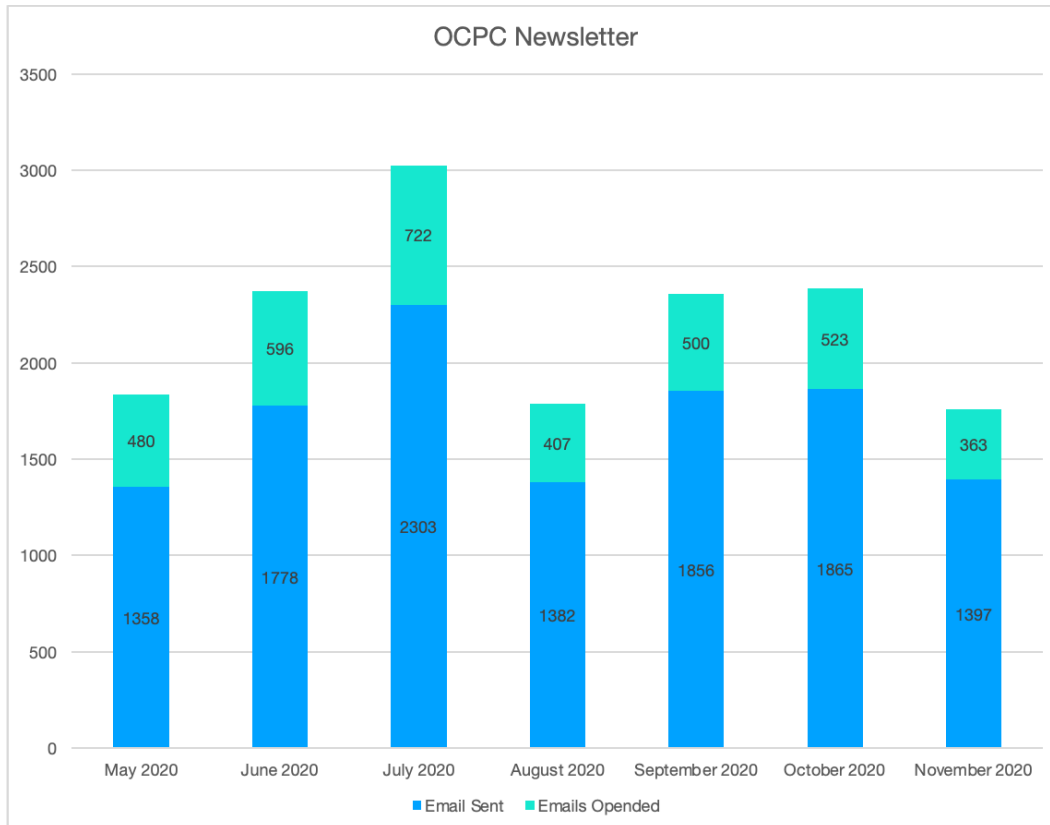
Digital correspondences such as email and social media are readily used by the Old Colony MPO in its outreach activities. Email is the primary method of communication used by MPO and is employed to send out meeting notifications and to respond to members of the public about MPO activities when utilized for public outreach purposes. Along with email, the MPO has establishing a strong social media presence. Currently the Old Colony MPO uses three different types of social media platforms in its outreach efforts. These three social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. It is through these social media platforms the MPO seeks to raise awareness about its initiatives at a time when so many things are competing for people’s attention. Also, the MPO seeks to get younger people involved in MPO activities and sees social media as the way to do it since this cohort tends to get most of their information through these platforms.

**Email**

The Old Colony MPO sends out large number of emails every year as part of its public outreach efforts. Last year in 2019 the MPO sent over 3,519 emails to inform members of the public and their officials of planning initiatives being conducted by the MPO. Contained in such emails are meeting flyers, agendas and additional information about who they should contact if they have any questions. Additionally, the MPO also solicits feedback from members of the public on publicly released documents such as the TIP and LRTP for which they can email in their comments and recommendation.

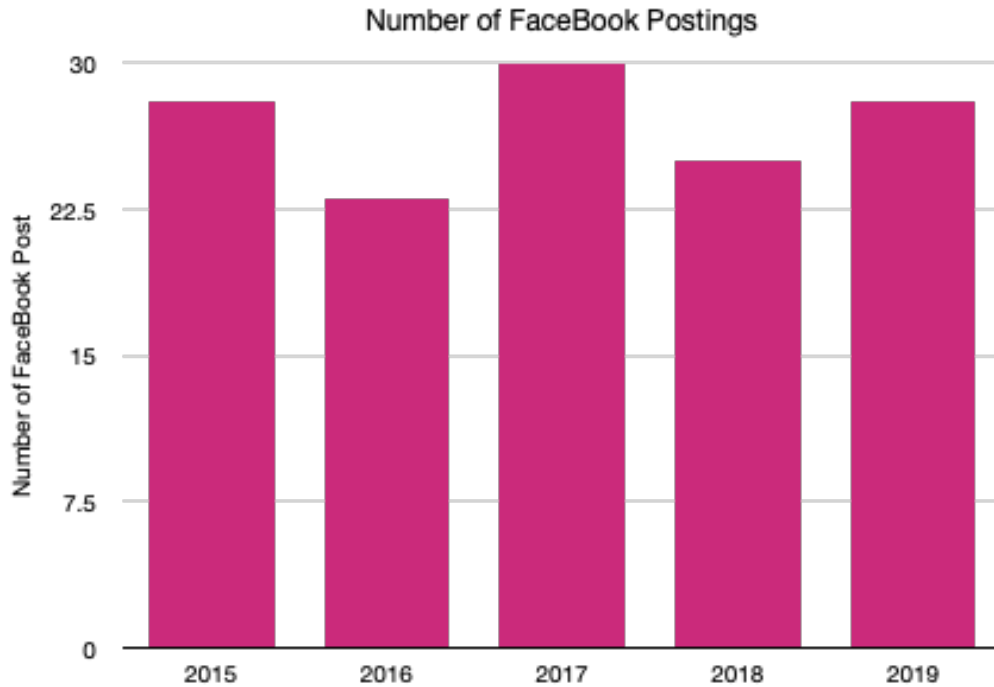
This year, OCPC started producing an organizational newsletter that is sent out to our 17 communities and partner organizations. The purpose of the newsletter is to inform the reader about what is currently happening at the council. The newsletter touches upon recently released documents, grant opportunities, and other relevant information the council believes our partners

should know about. Despite the start of publishing the newsletters in the month of May, OCPC sent out a total 12,081 newsletters for 2020. Out of the total newsletters sent, 3,606 of them were opened and read by the receiver. July 2020 was the month with the most newsletter sent out and opened but May had a higher open rate than June of 38% compared to the other months%.

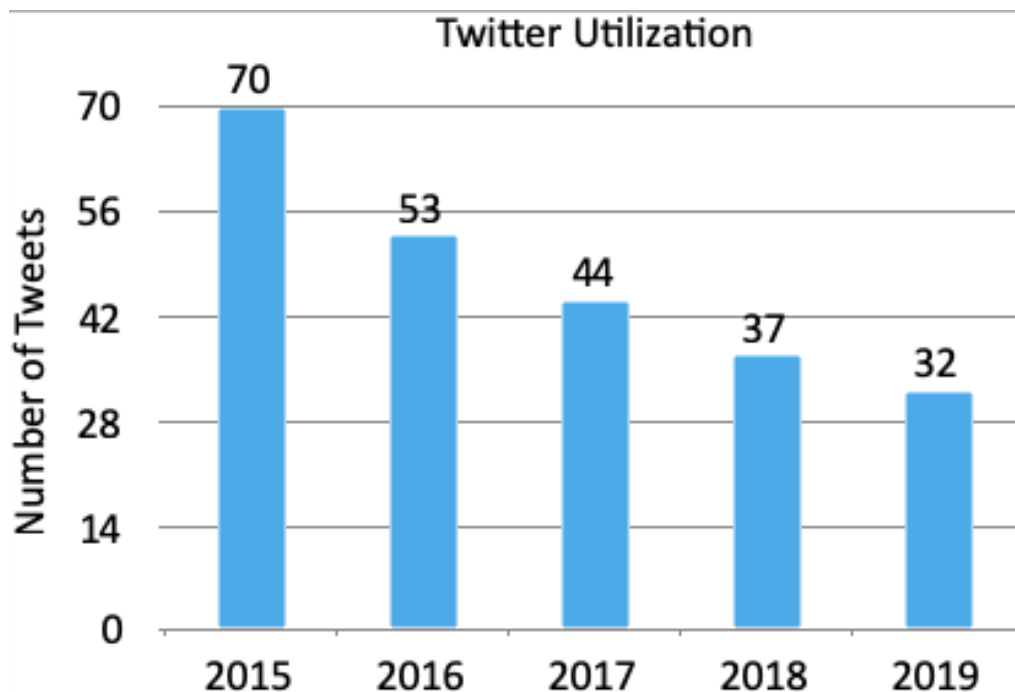


### Social Media

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are becoming an ever-larger part the Old Colony MPO’s go to for dissemination of public outreach notifications. In 2019, the MPO made 28 Facebook posts about public engagement events along with other regional and Commonwealth initiatives. The use of Facebook by the MPO has fluctuated over the last five years. This fluctuation in Facebook utilization has to do with the number of projects needing a public participation component and some project requiring a higher degree of public engagement such as the Long-Range Transportation Plan. Going forward the MPO sees an ever-increasing usage of Facebook as a platform for public engagement.



The MPO uses Twitter to send out information on upcoming outreach events, the release of public documents for review, and disseminate other regional information to members of the public. Last year in 2019 the MPO sent out 32 Twitter notifications which yield 58,422 impression. Twitter impressions convey how many times a tweet has been viewed. The use of Twitter by the MPO is down from the previous year and down overall when we look at a five-year period.



YouTube has been one of the social media platforms not fully utilized by the MPO. Over the last five years the MPO has only uploaded two informational videos. These two videos have received 107 views. The MPO is looking to YouTube to become a on call public presentation platform for projects and initiatives produced by OCPC. The benefit of using YouTube is that it gives members of the public a chance to see a presentation on a project or other planning Initiative if they cannot make a public meeting. In keeping with this desire to use YouTube more, the MPO has uploaded six presentation videos this year alone. Over the course of 2020, YouTube usage has increased as the MPO has been conducting public meetings online with the use of tools such as Zoom the online virtual meeting platform.

## **Conclusion**

The Old Colony MPO is diligent in its efforts to engage members of the public, especially those from underserved communities. Using a multiprong approach to public engagement, the MPO has sought to bring more individuals and organizations into the planning process. However, despite the efforts to move the needle and increase public participation, participations rates have fluctuated over the last five years. This fluctuation in public participation, stems from the number of projects happening each year and the public appetite to participate which seems to be waning due to completing priorities, and interest. To date there has been no request to translate MPO documents into another language and therefore no data exists to track the number of documents translated in the Safe Harbor determined languages. The MPO always translate meeting notices into the Haitian Creole, Spanish, and Portuguese and has language in the notices that language translation and interpretation is provided free of charge. To date, no requests have been made for translation services.

With the movement towards public participation taking place virtually on platforms like Zoom due to Covid-19, the MPO has seen public participation increase. The addition of virtual meeting platforms is something the Old Colony MPO plans to continue using to provide greater access to members of the public and organizations to participate in public meetings long after Covid-19 has passed. Allowing people to attend public meeting from the comfort of their homes or their offices seems to be a valuable tool going forward for the MPO to increase participation in the planning process.