Making Community Engagement a Conversation

- PRESENTATION AT MAKEOVER MONTGOMERY 4: MAY 10, 2018
Why Public Engagement?
Why Public Engagement? Perspectives

- Planners ask: “How can the system function better?”
- Broad regional vision
- Focus on a particular corridor, but in context

- The public asks: “How can my trips be made easier?”
- Narrower but more detailed vision
- Focus on a small number of commonly made journeys
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This Gap Can Make Planning More Challenging

- Can create anger and distrust among members of the public
- Planners get less information about what the public needs
Bridging the Gap in Montgomery County

- **BRT:** in the County Strategic Transit Plan since 1993
  - Support denser development
  - Reduce traffic congestion
- **In 2018, the first two lines are in the planning process**
  - MD 355: In Alternatives Analysis phase
  - US 29: In Final Design phase; expected to begin operation in 2020
Bridging the Gap in Montgomery County

- Corridor Advisory Committees (CACs)
  - Regular meetings of representatives from every neighborhood along the corridor
  - Allow planners to go more in-depth about planning challenges
  - Members become ambassadors for the project
Bridging the Gap: Community Mapping Activity

**PEDESTRIAN:**
- a. What are the most pleasant places to walk in your community?
- b. What places feel unsafe to walk?
- c. What places do you think would benefit from new pedestrian amenities, such as new or improved sidewalks, crosswalks, or improved lighting?

**BICYCLE:**
- a. Where do people like to bike in your community?
- b. Where does biking feel unsafe?
- c. Where would you like to see bikeshare stations?

**LOCAL BUS:**
- a. What bus stops in your community could benefit from amenities such as shelters or benches?
- b. What bus stops in your community are problematic?
- c. Which intersections do you think would benefit from Transit Signal Priority?
Bridging the Gap: Community Mapping Activity
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What Worked? What Didn’t Work?

- Successes: CAC activity, Community Roundtable activity
  - These started conversations or continued existing conversations
  - Provided lots of useful feedback

- Less successful: Open House activity
  - Didn’t start a conversation
  - Provided less useful feedback
  - Most of the feedback we got was about unrelated issues
What We Learned

▪ Treat public engagement as a conversation
  – Meet people where they’re at, and use their language
  – Demonstrate interest in their experiences and concerns
  – Make engagement both informative and fun

▪ When public engagement is a conversation, the gap between the planner’s perspective and the public’s perspective can be bridged.
THANK YOU!