



TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 6, 2025
TO: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
FROM: Stella Jordan, Public Engagement Program Manager
RE: Summary of FFY 2024 Public Engagement Activities and Evaluation of Public Engagement Program Effectiveness

1 PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The core function of the Public Engagement Program (the Program) is to develop and implement strategies to facilitate inclusive public engagement and transparency in the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) planning and decision-making processes. This is accomplished by providing timely and continuous public involvement opportunities and building relationships throughout the region to encourage and grow participation, especially in communities that have been underrepresented in transportation planning and disproportionately impacted by planning outcomes. Beyond providing opportunities for participation, the Program also strives to ensure that plans, policies, and decision-making outcomes are informed by and reflect public input and priorities.

One of the principles of the Program (as outlined in the [Public Engagement Plan](#)) is continuous evaluation and improvement. Each year, the Program documents engagement activities and inputs to help inform MPO decisions with the key themes and priorities heard through engagement activities and to identify gaps in engagement—such as particular communities and stakeholders that are underrepresented—and adapt strategies to address those gaps.

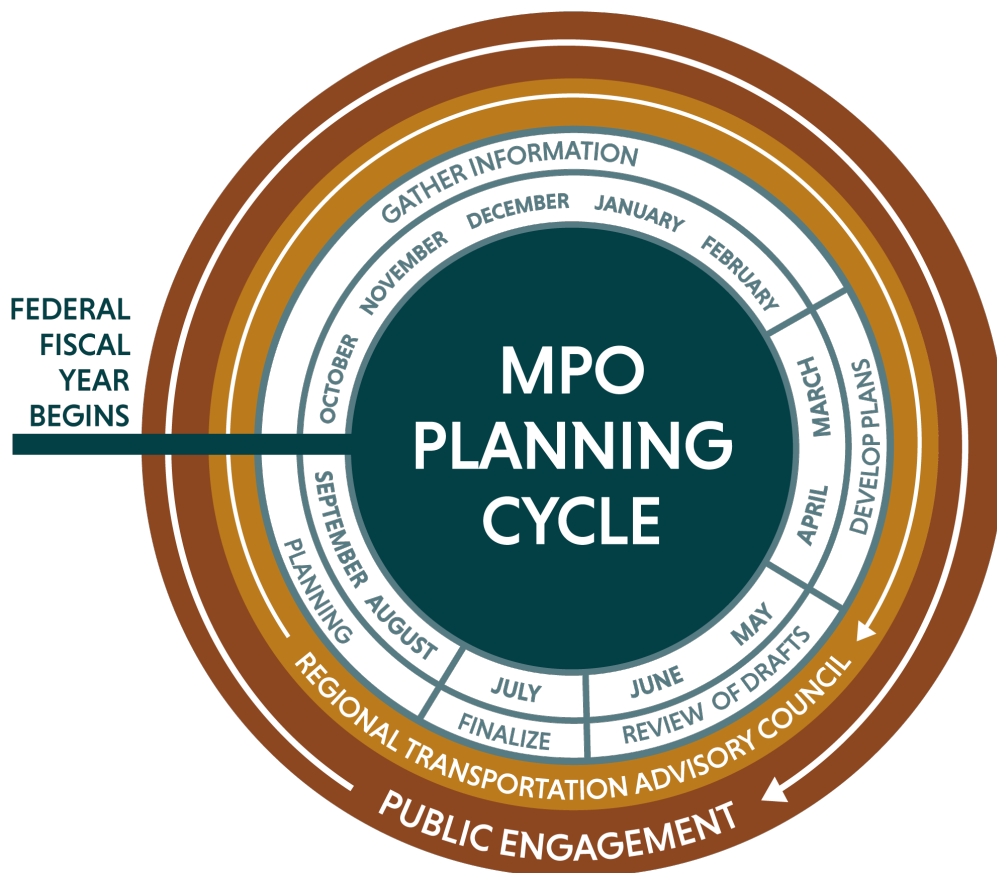
Starting in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2024, the Program began to present quarterly reports to the MPO board on topics and themes gathered from engagement activities with the goal of providing timely data to inform MPO planning decisions, particularly regarding the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). While those quarterly reports focus on what staff hear from stakeholders and the public, this annual summary focuses on what stakeholders and communities were engaged, how they were engaged, and what strategies staff plan to implement in the next FFY to address gaps and reach underrepresented communities.

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2 FFY 2024 OVERVIEW AND TIMELINE

The Program supported the development of the MPO’s three core documents during FFY 2024, which extended from October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024. These documents are the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), both of which are updated annually, and the LRTP, which is updated every four years. The update for the new LRTP began in FFY 2024. The Program ensured that the MPO met federal requirements for inclusive public participation, including seeking public feedback at key points in the planning and decision-making processes. Figure 1 illustrates the MPO planning cycle with standard development timelines and key engagement requirements for the MPO’s federally required certification documents.

**Figure 1
MPO Planning Cycle**



Source: Boston Region MPO staff.

The Program also supported other MPO programs and projects in FFY 2024, including by leading a discrete study with the Resilience Program that explored best practices and local preferences for environmental engagement. The study informed recommendations for the MPO to incorporate environmental perspectives and priorities into the transportation planning process.

The Program also developed a multi-year outlook to expand and deepen the MPO's public engagement practice and the connections between engagement and planning and policy decisions. This planning led to new engagement projects, such as the pilot Community Planning Lab educational program, the previously mentioned data-driven quarterly board updates, and research on best practices used by peer agencies for advisory body structures and memberships. The research on best practices eventually informed a plan to restructure the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Advisory Council).

In all of these Program activities, staff meet and sought to exceed federal requirements for public participation by creating numerous, accessible, and varied opportunities for people to engage in ways that meet their needs and preferences and reduce barriers they face to participating in planning. Building and deepening relationships, particularly with organizations that represent or serve transportation-disadvantaged communities¹ and underrepresented stakeholders, is an overarching goal that guides Program activities and strategic planning. Another key goal is building transparency during engagement about how feedback is used and ensuring follow-through with stakeholders about planning decisions.

3 BY THE NUMBERS

3.1 Meetings and Events

To support the Program's focus on creating varied engagement opportunities, reducing barriers, and building relationships, in FFY 2024 staff sought to increase MPO attendance and participation at community events and in-person events in particular. Staff also focused on developing and enhancing relationships with advocacy and community-based organizations by hosting one-on-one and small group meetings to learn about these organizations' priorities and discuss opportunities for engagement and collaboration.

Staff attended 30 in-person events in FFY 2024, most of which offered opportunities to conduct interactive activities (such as a street design game and

¹ Transportation-disadvantaged communities are those in which the majority of the population belongs to an equity population, defined by the MPO as people who identify as persons of color, have limited English proficiency, are 75 years old or older or 17 years old or younger, have a disability, or have low income.

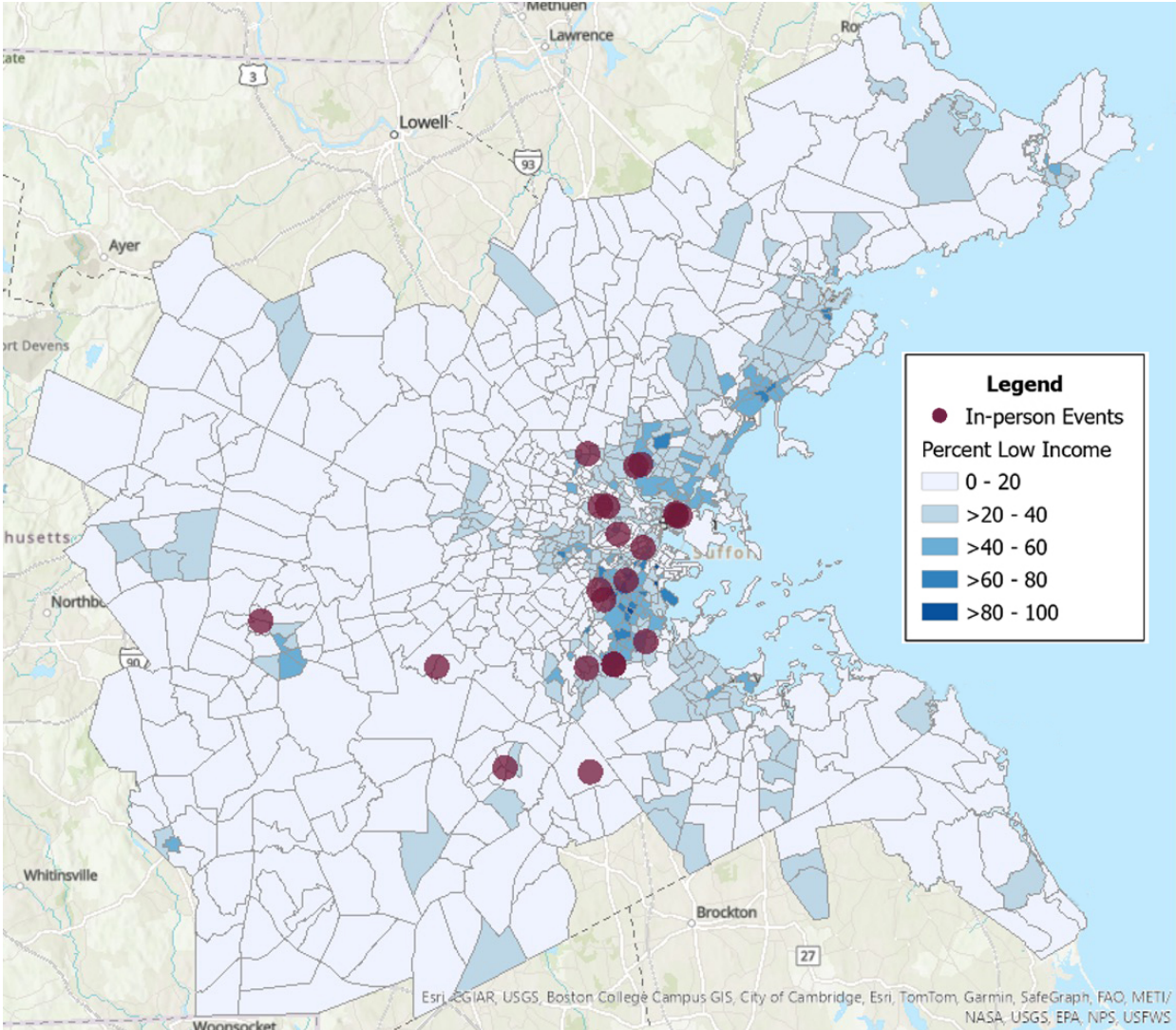
an infrastructure voting activity), distribute informational materials about the MPO, and discuss the transportation planning process with new audiences. Staff prioritized attending in-person events in transportation-disadvantaged communities, particularly communities with high proportions of residents who identify as people with low income², people of color³, or people with limited English proficiency⁴ and communities that are underrepresented in digital engagement and in the MPO's work in general. Staff engaged more than 1,100 people at these events. Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate the geographic distribution of in-person events staff attended in FFY 2024 in relation to the distribution of people with low income, people of color, and people with limited English proficiency in the Boston region, respectively.

² The MPO considers a person to have a low income if their annual family income is less than or equal to 200 percent of the poverty level for their family size.

³ People who identify as persons of color include those who identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x and/or a race other than white.

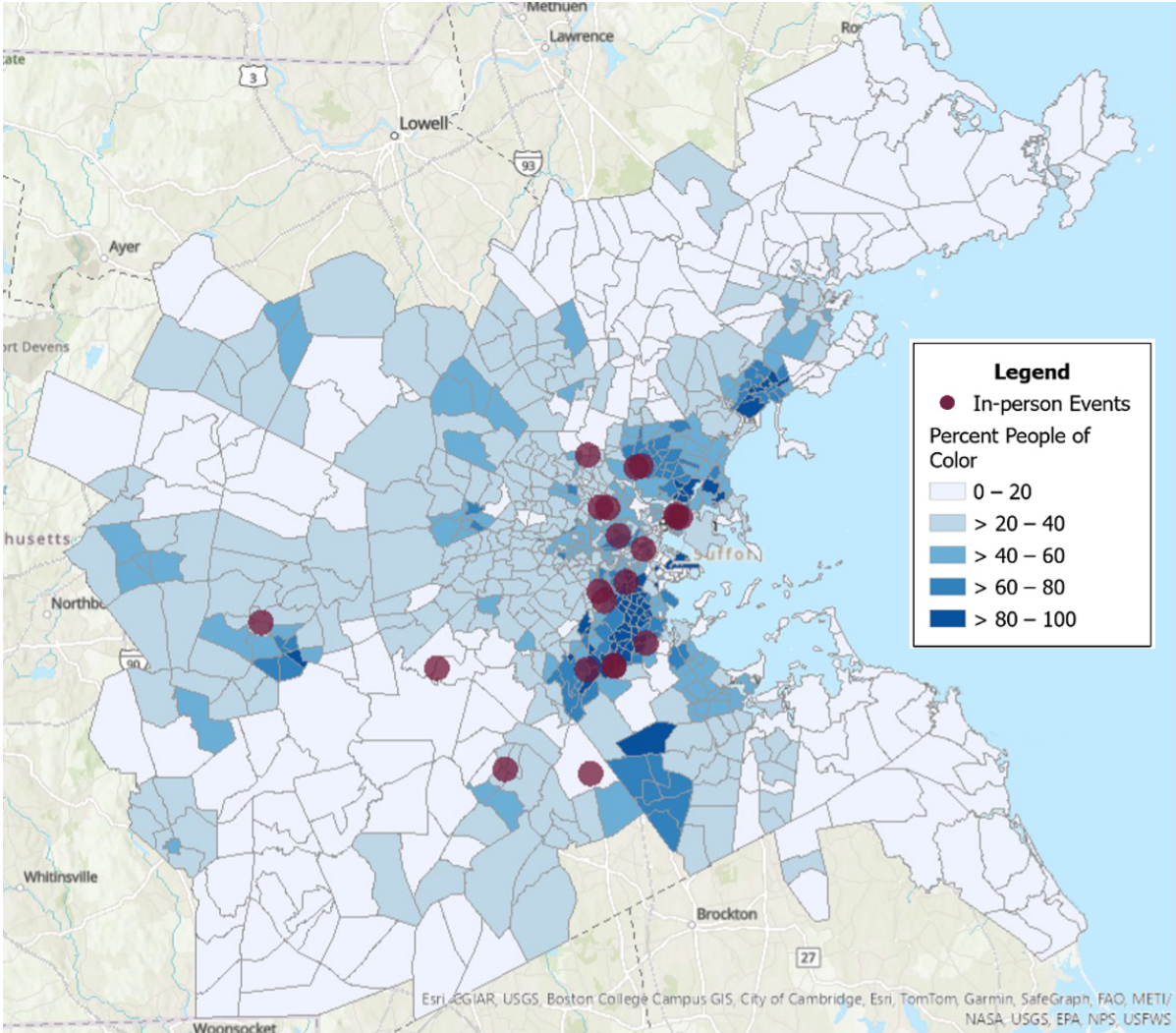
⁴ People with limited English proficiency are those who report speaking English less than "very well" on the American Community Survey.

Figure 2
FFY 2024 In-person Events in Relation to Low-Income Population



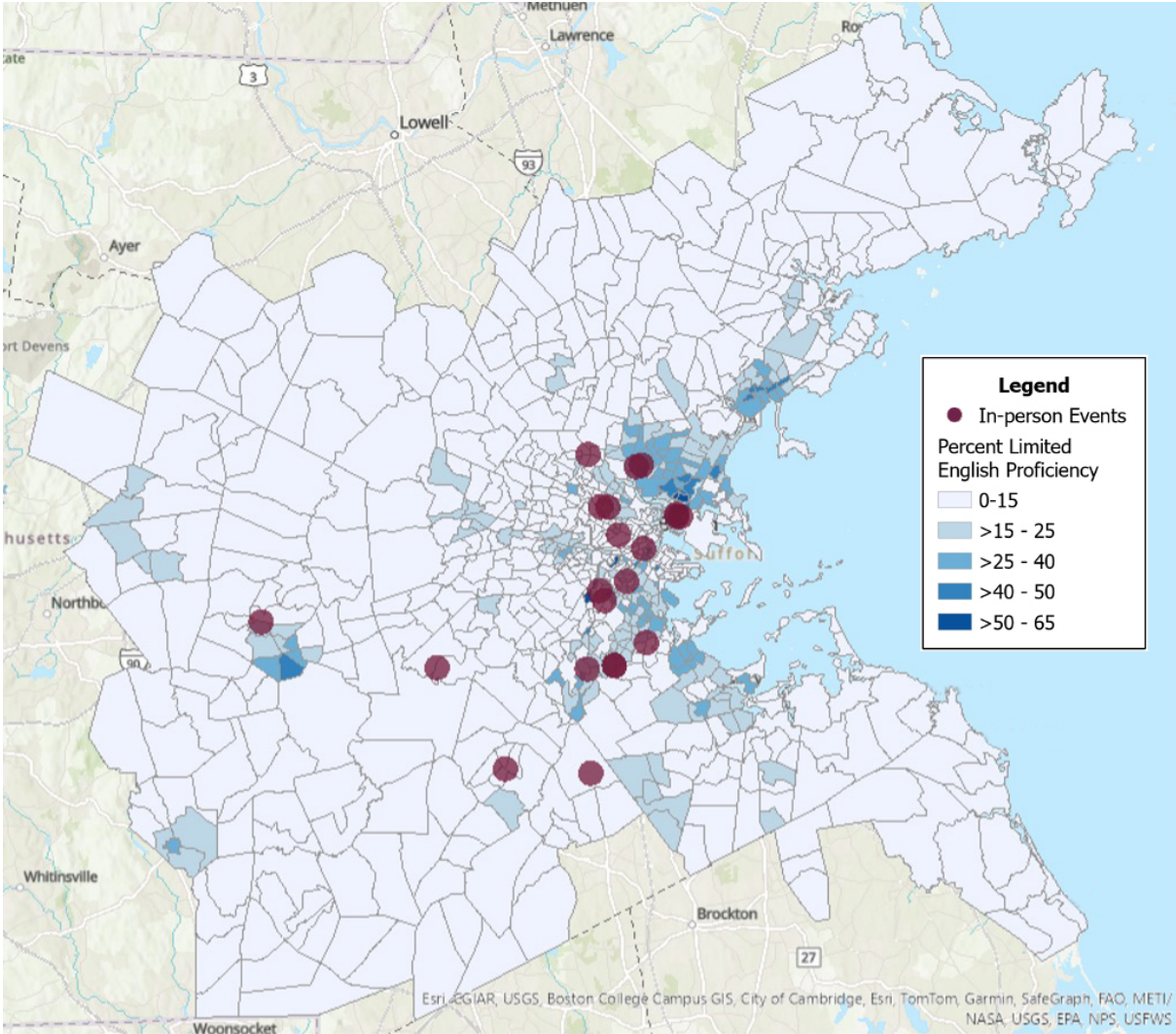
FFY = federal fiscal year.
Source: 2020 US Census, 2018-2023 American Community Survey, Esri, and Boston Region MPO staff.

Figure 3
FFY 2024 In-person Events in Relation to Population of People of Color



FFY = federal fiscal year.
Source: 2020 US Census, 2018-2023 American Community Survey, Esri, and Boston Region MPO staff.

Figure 4
FFY 2024 In-person Events in Relation to Limited English Proficiency Population

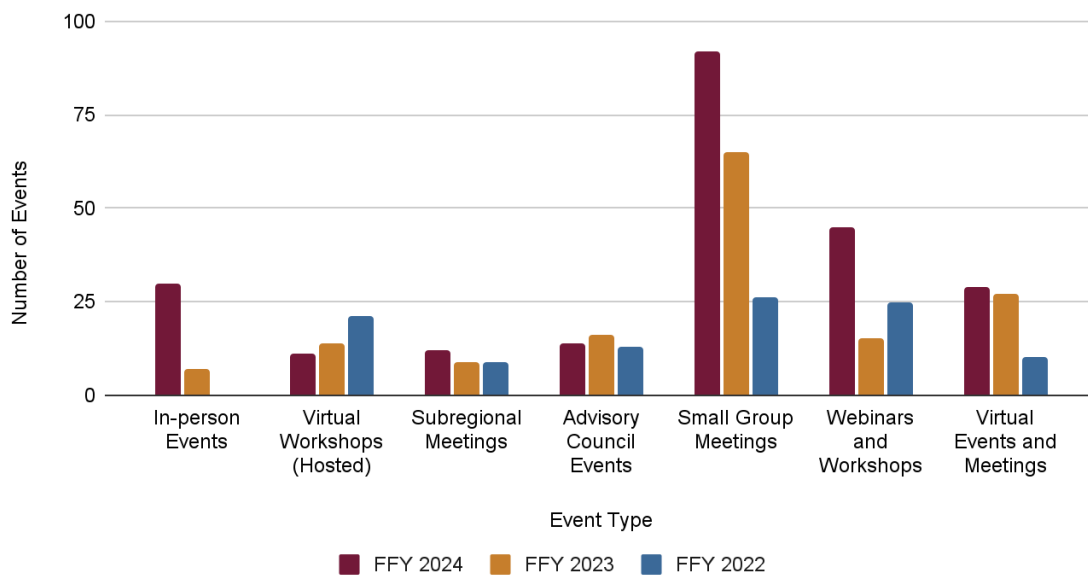


FFY = federal fiscal year.
Source: 2020 US Census, 2018-2023 American Community Survey, Esri, and Boston Region MPO staff.

Staff also hosted more than 90 one-on-one or small group meetings with stakeholders in FFY 2024. Most of these stakeholders were representatives of advocacy or community-based organizations with whom staff developed collaborative relationships. These relationships enabled staff to connect stakeholders and communities to different areas of the MPO’s work and build connections across and beyond specific programs and projects. For example, several of these connections led to stakeholders joining advisory bodies, the development of engagement partnerships for studies and projects, and collaboration on the MPO’s programmatic work.

Figure 5 illustrates the number and types of events staff attended and hosted during FFY 2024, as well as comparisons to FFY 2023 and FFY 2022. In particular, both attendance and participation at in-person events and the hosting of one-on-one and small group meetings in FFY 2024 reflect dramatic year-over-year increases for staff engagement.

Figure 5
Engagement Events Attended and Hosted by Staff in FFY 2024 and Previous Years



FFY = federal fiscal year.
 Source: Boston Region MPO staff.

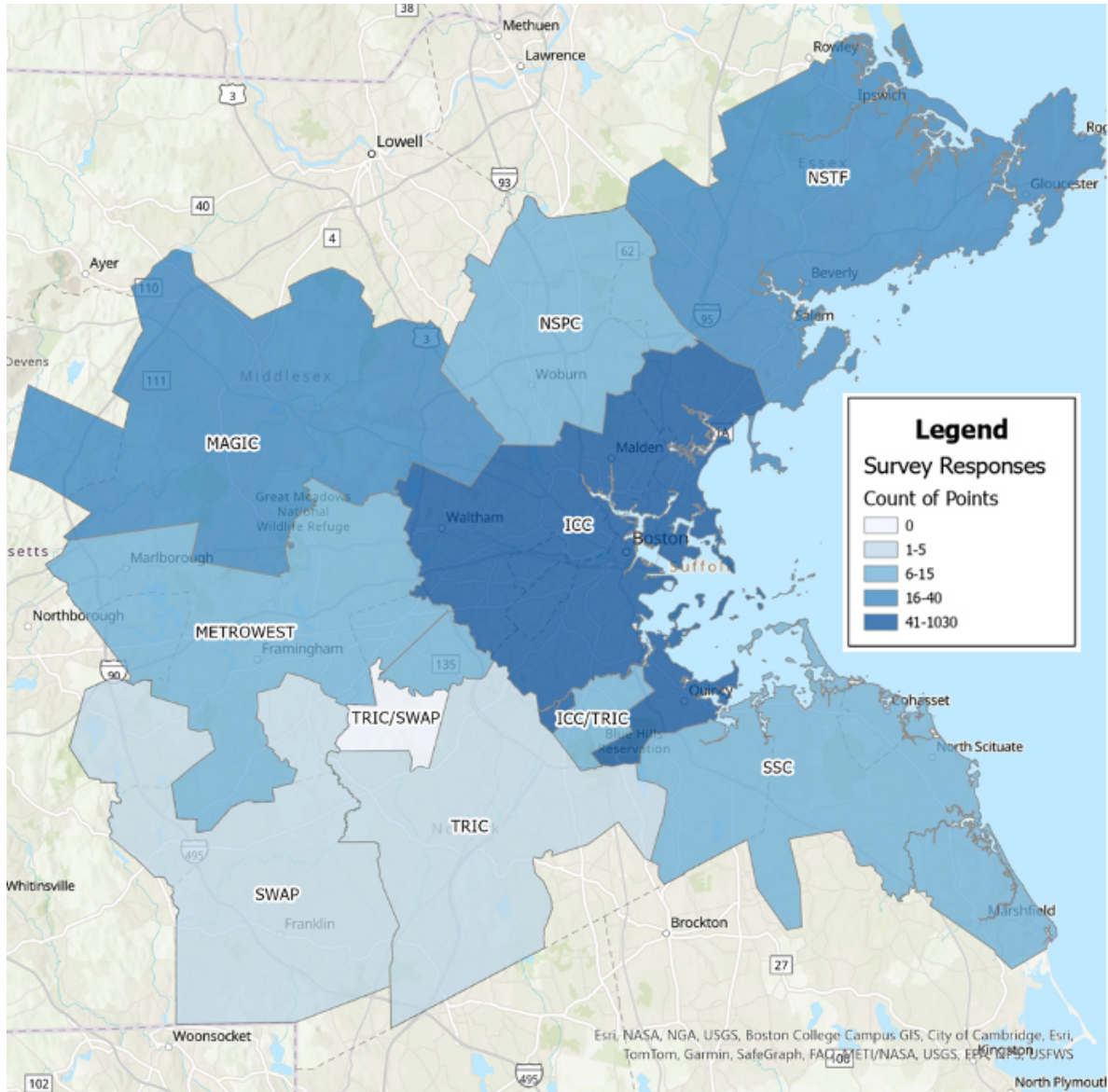
3.2 Surveys

Staff conducted four regionwide surveys in FFY 2024, receiving a total of 1,119 responses. Fewer surveys were conducted in FFY 2024 than in FFY 2023, because engagement for the current *Destination 2050* LRTP—including public surveying—was concentrated in FFY 2023. Staff expects FFY 2025 and 2026 to include more robust engagement and public surveying during the development of the next LRTP.

Staff included a standard set of optional zip code and demographic questions in all public surveys, and used the responses to these questions to track the reach of engagement efforts. Understanding where survey respondents are located helps staff identify gaps in survey engagement and work towards more equitable representation.

Figure 6 represents the aggregate geographic distribution of respondents to all surveys conducted in FFY 2024 by subregion. While there were fewer overall responses as compared to FFY 2023, in FFY 2024 there was a higher concentration of survey responses in the Inner Core and fairly comparable distributions across the other subregions. As in the previous year, staff identified geographic gaps in survey engagement. In both FFYs 2023 and 2024, gaps were found particularly in municipalities in the southwestern part of the region, so staff will work to address these gaps (along with the demographic gaps discussed below) through targeted outreach in FFY 2025. Planned engagement for the next LRTP in FFY 2025 will also offer increased opportunities to conduct targeted engagement. Staff will continue to explore strategies including engagement partnerships with local organizations and municipalities, tailored communications and engagement activities, participation incentives, and varied digital and in-person engagement methods to address gaps.

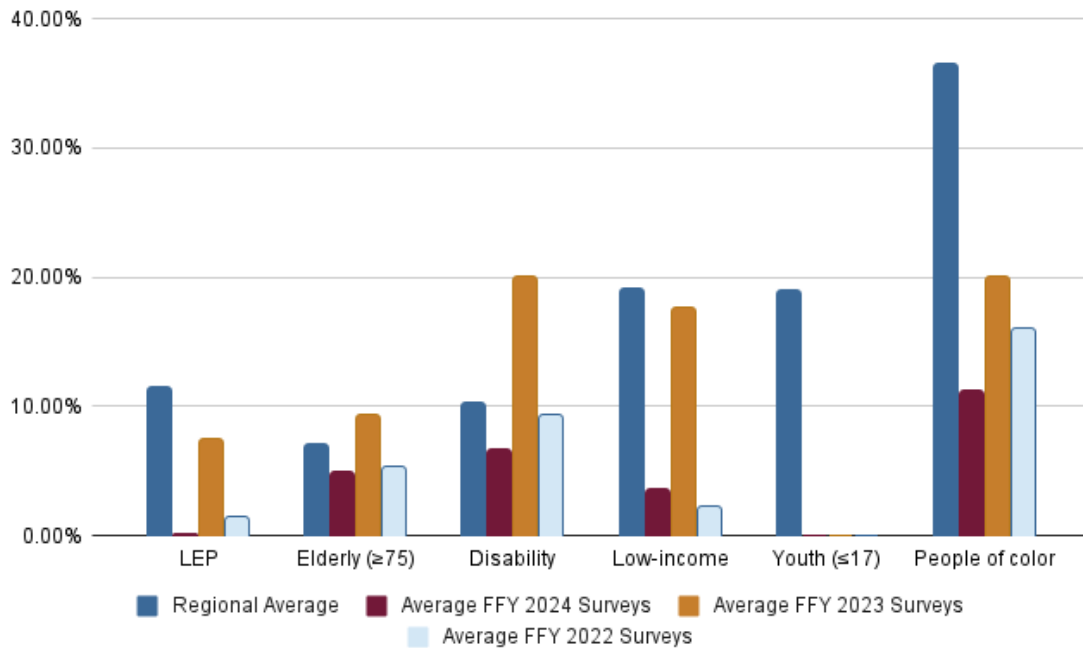
**Figure 6
Geographic Distribution (by Subregion) of FFY 2024 Survey Responses**



FFY = federal fiscal year.
 ICC = Inner Core Committee.
 MAGIC = Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination.
 MetroWest = MetroWest Regional Collaborative.
 NSPC = North Suburban Planning Council.
 NSTF = North Shore Task Force.
 SSC = South Shore Coalition.
 SWAP = SouthWest Advisory Planning Committee.
 TRIC = Three Rivers Interlocal Council.
 Source: Esri and Boston Region MPO staff.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of survey respondents who self-identified as members of transportation equity populations in FFY 2024 and the two previous FFYs, compared to the percentage of those populations in the Boston region.

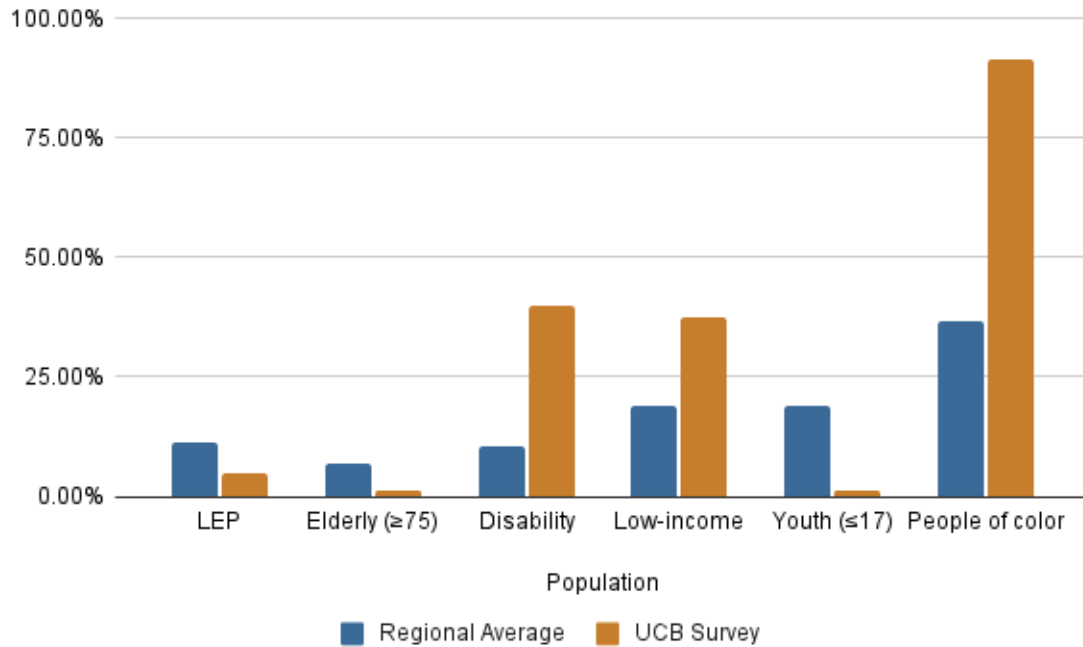
Figure 7
Demographics of Survey Respondents



FFY = federal fiscal year. LEP = limited English proficiency.
Source: 2020 US Census, 2018-2023 American Community Survey, and Boston Region MPO staff.

These demographic comparisons show critical gaps in survey responses from equity populations, particularly people with limited English proficiency and youth. As a result of these findings, staff have conducted targeted outreach and surveys to seek feedback from these communities, particularly by connecting with community-based organizations that represent or serve these communities and by providing participation incentives. One example of targeted engagement and surveying was an effort conducted in partnership with Union Capital Boston, an organization that incentivizes community engagement and public participation, particularly among low-income communities, communities of color, and Spanish speakers in Boston. Figure 8 shows the percentage of survey respondents who self-identified as members of transportation equity populations in that engagement activity.

Figure 8
Demographics of Survey Respondents from
Union Capital Boston Survey Engagement



FFY = federal fiscal year. LEP = limited English proficiency. UCB = Union Capital Boston.
 Source: 2020 US Census, 2018-2023 American Community Survey, and Boston Region MPO staff.

In addition to targeted survey engagement, staff have also explored methods other than surveys to more effectively reach transportation-disadvantaged communities. Engagement professionals recommend a best practice of supplementing digital-only engagement methods, such as digital surveying, with a variety of interactive in-person activities and attendance at community events. Staff have previously conducted these kinds of supplemental activities, prioritizing attendance and involvement at in-person events in transportation-disadvantaged communities and communities that have historically been underrepresented in the MPO’s work.

While staff do not collect detailed demographic data on the attendees at these events, the demographic characteristics of the communities surrounding these locations can be used as rough proxies. Figure 9 shows a list of these in-person events, the approximate number of people engaged at each event, and the average percentage of people with low income, limited English proficiency, and people of color residing in all census tracts within a two-mile radius of the location where the event took place.

Table 1
Demographics in Vicinity of In-Person Events in FFY 2024

In-person Events	People Engaged	Low-income	Limited English Proficiency	People of Color
Regional Average		19.10%	11.40%	36.50%
Open Streets East Boston	50	39.0%	44.5%	71.0%
Mattapan Square Farmers Market	15	36.5%	15.5%	61.0%
SomerStreets	150	24.0%	13.5%	49.0%
MIT Youth Climate Action Conference	20	24.5%	14.0%	47.0%
Charles River Clean-up	5	5.5%	3.0%	23.0%
Bike Month Kick-off Event	75	24.0%	13.5%	49.0%
Wake Up the Earth Festival	175	46.5%	30.5%	58.0%
Open Streets Dorchester	125	39.5%	20.0%	56.0%
Everett Transportation Fair	36	33.0%	23.5%	57.0%
Mystic Greenways Spring Walking Tour	15	28.5%	16.0%	39.0%
State of the Streets Gathering	10	45.0%	30.5%	48.0%
TRIC State of Transportation Event	20	19.0%	13.0%	25.5%
Open Streets Jamaica Plain	120	46.5%	30.5%	58.0%
East Boston Community Walk	10	39.0%	44.0%	71.0%
Open Streets Hyde Park	100	34.5%	23.5%	72.5%
Framingham Farmers Market	20	28.5%	26.5%	52.5%
Mattapan Teen Day	20	28.0%	19.5%	57.0%
Neponset River Walking Tour	15	10.5%	7.0%	46.0%
Open Streets East Boston	100	39.0%	44.0%	71.0%
Community Planning Lab Pilot Program	5	40.0%	27.0%	52.5%

FFY = federal fiscal year.
Source: 2020 US Census, 2018-2023 American Community Survey, and Boston Region MPO staff.

3.3 External Communications

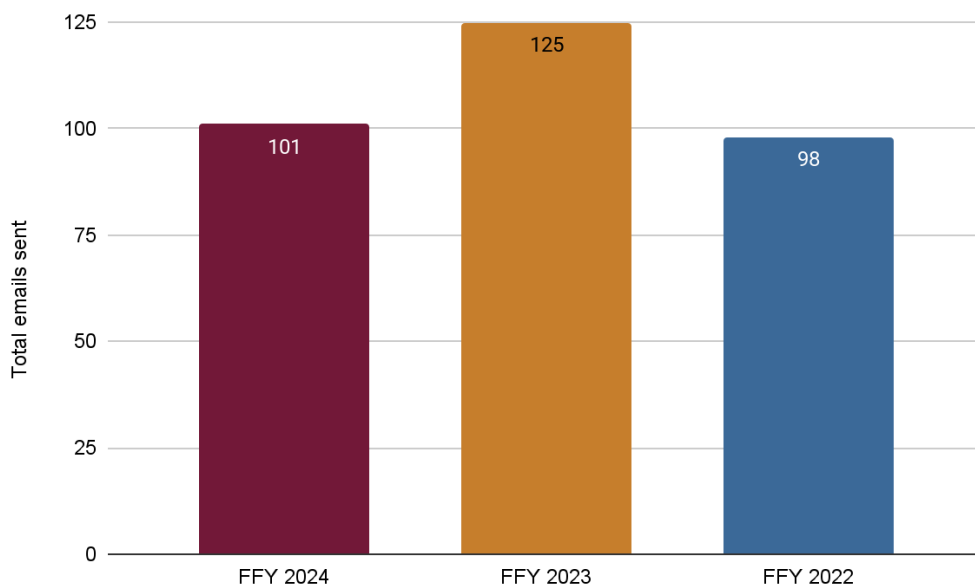
All engagement activities in FFY 2024 were supported by a suite of communication channels, including MailChimp (email), X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and LinkedIn. Where meeting, event, and survey engagement seeks to draw people into the MPO’s work, build relationships, and gather input, communications enable these connections by distributing clear and accessible

information to stakeholders and the public about the MPO’s work and engagement opportunities.

Email

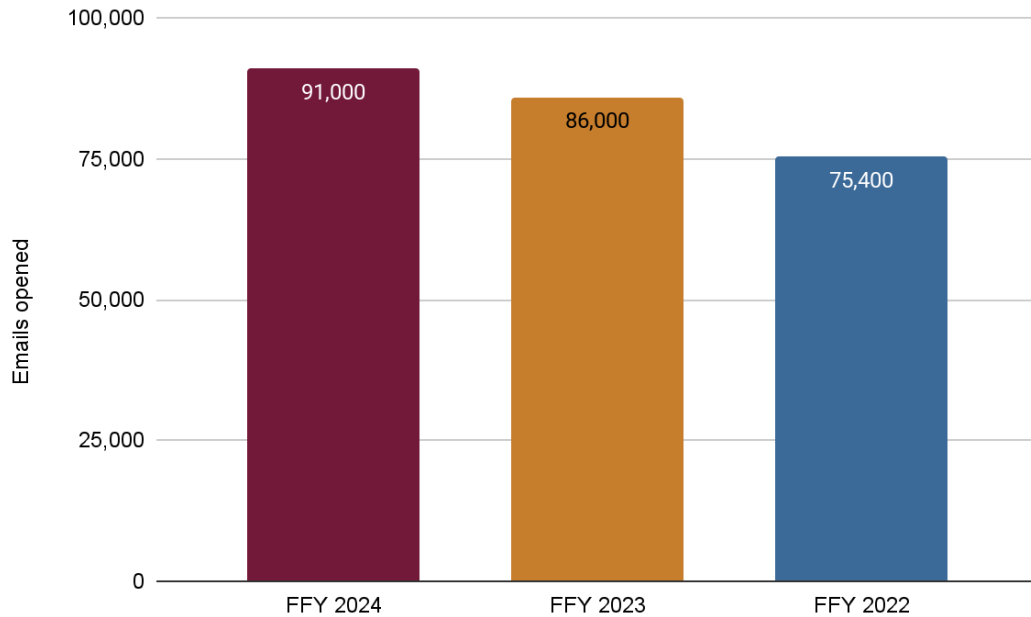
Staff use the MailChimp platform to manage contacts and email lists and send timely email communications about MPO engagement opportunities, including messages about upcoming meetings and events and details about public comment periods and other participation opportunities. In FFY 2024, staff sent 101 emails to MPO email lists via MailChimp that were opened approximately 91,000 times, representing a substantial increase in overall email engagement from FFY 2023. Figures 10 and 11 show comparisons in email engagement (MailChimp emails sent to MPO email lists and number of emails opened by subscribers, respectively) between FFY 2024 and the two previous FFYs.

**Figure 9
MailChimp Emails Sent in FFY 2024**



FFY = federal fiscal year.
 Source: Boston Region MPO staff.

Figure 10
MailChimp Emails Opened in FFY 2024



FFY = federal fiscal year.
 Source: Boston Region MPO staff.

Social Media

Staff connect with stakeholders and disseminate information about public involvement opportunities via social media. In FFY 2024, staff primarily used X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn. Staff occasionally shared content on Facebook as well, but the usefulness of the platform has declined as modifications to Facebook’s algorithm and financial model have limited the visibility of content that does not have paid promotion underneath it.

As of the end of FFY 2024, the Boston Region MPO (@BostonRegionMPO) had 1,458 followers on X (formerly Twitter). X continues to be an important platform for the dissemination of engagement content despite changes to the platform since 2022 that caused engagement via X to decrease.

LinkedIn is an increasingly important element of the MPO’s social media presence. The MPO’s following on the platform increased compared to FFY 2023, and impressions during FFY 2024 grew to approximately 32,000, more than doubling the previous year’s. Staff sees an opportunity to continue to

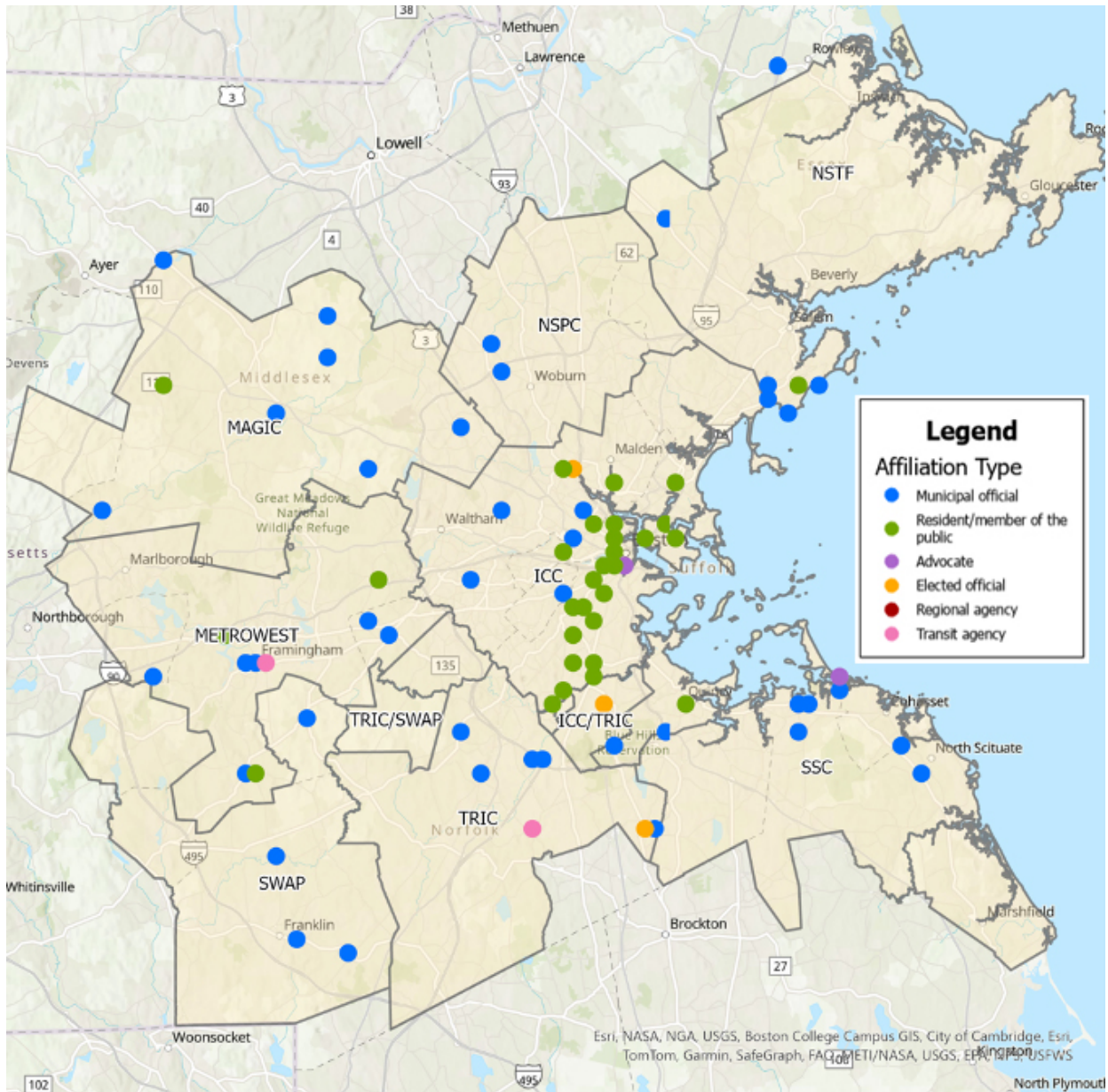
expand the organization's activity on LinkedIn as a way of connecting with professional planners, advocates, and thought leaders.

3.4 Comments

Staff collected a total of 391 individual comments during FFY 2024. These comments were collected during virtual and in-person engagement events, submitted through MPO comment forms, or received directly via emails to staff. Some comments were prompted by specific questions, activities, or communications solicitations, and others were shared unprompted. Staff received comments from a variety of stakeholders, including members of the general public, advocacy and community-based organizations, municipal staff, and other government agency representatives and officials.

Staff collect zip codes from comments shared via comment forms, but comments collected through other means are not always geographically coded by default. As a proxy for commenter location, staff assigns zip codes to comments received at location-based or location-focused events and comments that mention a particular location. Figure 12 shows the distribution of geographically coded comments received during FFY 2024.

Figure 11
Geographic Distribution of FFY 2024 Public Comments



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 MetroWest = MetroWest Regional Collaborative.
 NSPC = North Suburban Planning Council.
 NSTF = North Shore Task Force.
 SSC = South Shore Coalition.
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 Source: Esri and Boston Region MPO staff.

4 PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS

The [FFY 2023 Engagement Summary Memo](#) established several goals for the Program in FFY 2024:

1. Continue to build and strengthen relationships with community-based organizations, particularly those that represent or serve transportation equity populations.
2. Address gaps in digital engagement (in particular engagement with youth, people of color, and people with limited English proficiency) and engage more people and communities who have not previously engaged with the MPO.
3. Use new strategies and tools to address these gaps and build relationships, including improved data collection and analysis tools, partnerships with community-based organizations and participation incentives, and equity-focused, community-specific methods and activities.
4. Support the development of the regional Vision Zero Action Plan.
5. Expand the membership and increase the effectiveness of the Advisory Council.
6. Update the Public Engagement Plan (PEP).

The Program has made significant progress towards these goals in FFY 2024.

Relationship-building has remained a core focus of the Program. The strong relationships staff forged with advocacy and community-based organizations in particular have led to an increased ability to engage communities that are traditionally harder to reach. These relationships have allowed staff to build connections across and throughout different areas of MPO work, and have also enabled successful project-focused partnership activities such as the co-hosting of engagement events. Partnership activities with community-based organizations have also offered a venue for staff to test new strategies for incentivizing participation, including directly through a community-based organization platform like Union Capital Boston's as well as via other methods such as the provision of gift cards or MBTA tickets to reduce barriers for people who want to participate in events. Staff also piloted the Community Planning Lab in FFY 2024 to build new relationships with organizations that represent or serve transportation-disadvantaged communities and that have not been previously engaged with the MPO. The Community Planning Lab also served to build knowledge and capacity among those organizations that wish to engage more deeply in the MPO's work. These methods and activities address the first three goals established for the Program in FFY 2024, and have helped the MPO more intentionally confront gaps in engagement and barriers to participation faced by transportation-disadvantaged communities in particular.

The Program addressed the fourth goal by providing strategic planning support to the Vision Zero Action Plan in FFY 2024, working with other staff and a consultant project team to develop a variety of engagement and communication strategies and tools for the project. The Program has been able to leverage existing relationships with community-based organizations and other stakeholders throughout the region to support this effort and lay the groundwork for ongoing partnerships throughout and beyond the Vision Zero project, and the project has also offered additional opportunities for staff to cultivate new relationships with community-based organizations.

In advancing the fifth goal established for FFY 2024, expanding the membership and increasing the effectiveness of the Advisory Council, the Program conducted research into peer agencies' advisory bodies to assess best practices for membership and meeting structure. In parallel, staff worked with the Advisory Council during FFY 2024 to develop a mission statement and goals for the group to inform an update to the Advisory Council description in the MPO's Memorandum of Understanding. Through this research and planning staff identified opportunities to implement the best practices, expand and diversify membership, and bring the Advisory Council into closer alignment with MPO program and project planning cycles and input opportunities through a restructuring. At the end of FFY 2024 and into the beginning of FFY 2025, staff implemented a plan to sunset the former Advisory Council structure and membership while working to develop a new MPO advisory body that would become active in FFY 2025.

Finally, staff planned for an update of the Public Engagement Plan (PEP) during FFY 2024, outlining several key areas for revision and expansion of the PEP. The revisions would align the PEP with the current LRTP and deepen the definition of existing public engagement principles, practices, and policies that have been implemented since the last PEP update as the MPO's engagement work has developed. Staff also began work on an Engagement Guidebook in FFY 2024, intended to be a public-facing companion to the PEP that outlines key areas where members of the public can meaningfully engage with the MPO's work. Building on the work done during FFY 2024, staff plans to publish both the Engagement Guidebook and the full PEP update in FFY 2025.

5 IMPACTS OF ENGAGEMENT

While it is difficult to quantify the exact impacts of engagement efforts on the MPO's planning and decision-making, several points stand out in FFY 2024. A key focus for the Program during this FFY was to better connect public feedback with planning outcomes in order to illustrate the impact that engagement can have on the MPO's work. To that end, staff made several significant

improvements to engagement data tracking and analysis processes and tools, resulting in more robust analyses of the demographics and geographic distribution of engagement activities, and the identification of themes and priorities from public input. Staff then developed these thematic analyses into quarterly reports shared with the MPO board to highlight trends in public input and encourage the application of these data to planning and policy decisions, particularly during the development of the next LRTP. The first of these quarterly reports was presented at the end of FFY 2024, and staff plans to continue delivering regular updates throughout subsequent FFYs.

A discrete study co-managed by the Program in FFY 2024, [Strategies for Environmental Outreach and Engagement](#), was impactful in developing and refining effective engagement and communication strategies, forging new relationships, and exploring ways to more intentionally incorporate environmental priorities and perspectives into the MPO's work. This study addressed gaps that staff and external partners had previously identified in engagement with environmental stakeholders, including advocacy and community-based organizations and municipal staff focused specifically on environmental and climate resilience topics.

Through a series of surveys, interviews, and events, staff developed a network of new and deeper relationships while learning about relevant work and priorities in the region. The study produced several recommendations for ways the MPO can more effectively support and lead climate resilience efforts by connecting and convening environmental stakeholders and strengthening mechanisms for meaningfully incorporating their input into planning and policy decisions, including in the development of the TIP and LRTP. The study also led to the identification of several key areas for further research and opportunities to provide environmentally-focused technical assistance, including by providing mapping, modeling, data analysis, and engagement support to municipalities.

Another important impact of engagement in FFY 2024 was generated through the creation and piloting of a new program activity, the Community Planning Lab. This educational program was developed in collaboration with members of the Advisory Council, and modeled on successful public education programs run by other planning agencies. The goal of the Community Planning Lab was to provide knowledge and tools to bring new and underrepresented voices into the planning process by empowering stakeholders to advocate effectively to the MPO about their communities' transportation needs and priorities. The pilot Community Planning Lab program, held at the end of FFY 2024, brought together five staff members or volunteers of community-based organizations who represented and served communities that are currently underrepresented in the MPO's work. Staff built strong relationships with these organizations, which have

led to further collaboration on issues related to the priorities participants explored during the Community Planning Lab.

6 GOALS FOR FFY 2025

The Program has established the following goals for engagement in FFY 2025:

1. Continue building and enhancing relationships with advocacy and community-based organizations and other stakeholders who are not currently well represented in the MPO's planning process.
2. Continue improving qualitative analysis methods and information-sharing structures to build transparency and more effectively identify and address gaps in engagement and representation.
3. Implement a new MPO advisory body with a new membership and meeting structure and closer connections to MPO work.
4. Develop engagement plans and strategies and begin focused engagement to support the development of the 2027 LRTP.
5. Update the Public Engagement Plan.

Building and strengthening relationships will remain a central focus for the Program throughout the next FFYs, particularly with advocacy and community-based organizations representing and serving transportation-disadvantaged communities. Staff will also continue to prioritize participation in community events and targeted engagement activities in communities where gaps in engagement have been identified in FFY 2024, including youth and people with limited English proficiency in particular as well as other transportation-disadvantaged and underrepresented communities. To support this engagement and relationship-building, staff will continue to develop mechanisms to ensure stakeholders' input is tracked, effectively incorporated into planning work, and reflected transparently in decision-making.

In depth data analysis and more comprehensive and consistent reporting will support staff in identifying and addressing gaps, as well as in improving connections between stakeholder input and planning outcomes. Staff will continue to explore and implement new data analysis methods, tools, and platforms in FFY 2025. The intent will be to facilitate the production of more comprehensive annual program evaluation reports and quarterly engagement theme updates by combining data about the demographic and geographic reach of engagement activities with data about the feedback collected through those activities. These data will be shared with staff and decision-makers to inform planning and policy decisions, as well as with external stakeholders and the public to build transparency and close feedback loops.

Staff will continue to finalize strategic plans in FFY 2025 for the restructuring of the Advisory Council into a new MPO advisory body, and the development of an

engagement plan and activities for the next LRTP. These planning activities are expected to continue into FFY 2026 as the details and scopes of the new advisory body and the 2027 LRTP development are further refined. Staff aim to finalize and request public review for the updated PEP document in FFY 2025.

CIVIL RIGHTS NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

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You are invited to participate in our transportation planning process, free from discrimination. The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is committed to nondiscrimination in all activities and complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency). Related federal and state nondiscrimination laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, disability, and additional protected characteristics.

For additional information or to file a civil rights complaint, visit www.bostonmpo.org/mpo_non_discrimination.

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Boston, MA 02116

Phone: 857.702.3700

Email: civilrights@ctps.org

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