



# Wake Transit Partners build trust by listening, acting and adapting



**It's as simple as the community said it, so we did it. That's what we try to do with our community input: this is what you said you wanted, so we brought it to you.**

**—Juan Carlos Erickson**

**Community Engagement Manager at GoTriangle**



## Responding to rapid growth

Public transit planning has become a priority in Wake County, North Carolina for a reason familiar to many U.S. cities: growth. Wake's population increased 18.2% from 2010 to 2017 and the population density is expected to increase 31% [over the course of 10 years](#).

So how do you make sure that public transit can address a growing population, ensure underrepresented groups are heard, and tell a big picture story that considers all stakeholders?

## Success through a better engagement process

GoTriangle implemented a robust public engagement effort to:

- Conduct needs-based surveys that reached beyond self-selectors
- Fill in demographic gaps through targeted advertising
- Lower barriers to entry for public participation
- Acted quickly to show residents' voices were heard
- Close the loop with stakeholders to build internal trust, community trust, and win a new grant



## Combining offline and online community engagement efforts

**GoTriangle** leads a large team of partners in the public outreach efforts for the Wake Transit Plan's implementation, working to create materials and messaging that break down complex technical components of a multi-year plan that involves bus, bus rapid transit and commuter rail service. At the start, engagement aimed to educate the public about the Wake Transit Plan and provide the general framework for the community's investment in transit. The first phase of outreach also asked people to weigh in on priorities for the bus network. For example, community members indicated whether they would prefer adding more service to already served areas or extending service to places without bus service.



**Our public engagement strategy at the beginning was a matter of educating the community on what their community investment is, how important their participation is and what we're doing.**



The second phase of outreach greatly expanded the level of engagement and involved more than 30 events across Wake County. Festivals, community meetings, board meetings, nonprofit events and pop-ups at transit centers, combined with traditional public meetings and online engagement, doubled the number of opportunities for residents to participate in shaping their community investment in transit. Working with community organizations to reach people helped build trust and inform outreach to be more effective.





**Robust engagement online that works hand-in-hand with in-person outreach is key to ensuring a long-term plan like this has broad, consistent reach across all communities.** Surveys that range from simple comment requests to complex route mapping questions embed seamlessly into existing websites and circulate online with accompanying custom graphics.



**We can push public involvement messages and surveys to specific pockets, and that has been very important when we try to make sure we close the gap.**



Recognizing that technology and mobility have changed residents' expectations for communication, GoTriangle took to using **targeted social media advertising** and **PublicInput.com's news integrations** to reach residents on their computers and mobile devices.

Through PublicInput.com integrations, GoTriangle was able to **place geo-targeted survey ads on the local NBC affiliate's website (WRAL.com), Facebook, and Univision** to increase their reach and engage Spanish-speaking residents.

"When we targeted a section of North Raleigh where we know Hispanics live, we saw immediate success," said Erickson. "We had 25 Hispanic participants in the first push alone."



## Engaging internal stakeholders with better analytics

After reaching thousands of residents for feedback on over 50 bus routes, it was time to dig into the results and analyze key priorities that emerged. One key activity was using data visualizations and summary reports to make the large response set understandable to internal stakeholders.



**We can take [results] around to internal meetings with city council, the board of commissioners, different nonprofits. We talk about it in our press releases and when we are interviewed on TV and radio.**



## Closing the engagement loop to build trust

With a more full understanding of public opinion to justify future decisions, GoTriangle was ready to get started. The project team analyzed survey results, budget, and time constraints to take immediate action: **improving GoTriangle, GoRaleigh, and GoCary routes identified from resident responses.**

Bus frequency was increased throughout Wake County with more buses arriving every half hour rather than hourly. Other routes added or expanded Sunday service, and budget was also allocated to continue work on express routes to smaller municipalities such as Fuquay-Varina, Knightdale, and Zebulon.

From outreach, to data, to results, GoTriangle was now able to tell a clear story—both internally and to the public—to close the feedback loop and create trust.



**What does the community say [they want], and what can we do to show people that we are putting their money to work?**



After understanding public need and rolling out an action plan, Erickson's team did a critical thing: **they let community members know what they did with the responses they received.** The draft transit plan was released to the public and sent to project participants.

According to [recent studies](#), this follow-up is the biggest predictor of increased public trust.



## Re-engaging participants to build data & win grant funding

With a community engagement process now in place, GoTriangle was able to more quickly engage the public on follow up topics.



**We have a task in the Wake Transit Plan for a major investment study to determine where bus rapid transit should be in the county, and also to determine the details of a possible commuter rail.**



To fulfill this aspect of the plan, Juan Carlos's team launched a follow-up survey to re-engage residents in the decisions about BRT and commuter rail. That follow-up survey would go on to receive **700 responses**.

Those responses proved critical for something bigger: **grant funding**.

Prior to working with PublicInput.com to engage the public, GoTriangle had applied for grants for clean technologies like electric buses. With only word-of-mouth proof of public support, the grant was initially denied.

Now armed with solid data, GoTriangle re-applied for the clean tech grant.

**"Then we were able to get the grant,"** said Erickson, who pointed to quantified public interest in the technology as critical to securing the funding.



## Key Takeaway: Building Public Trust Depends On A Better Engagement **Process**

Juan Carlos and the GoTriangle team inherently knew that a holistic approach was critical to success.  
Here's how we visualize the process they followed:

