

MEMORANDUM

To: Darin Grossi, Tamara Blankenship
From: Amber Collins
Date: July 29, 2025
RE: North-South Connector Study/Greenley Road Extension – Public Engagement Plan

Introduction

The North-South Connector Study (Study) is a collaborative effort between Tuolumne County Transportation Council (TCTC), County of Tuolumne (County), and City of Sonora (City). TCTC is leading the development of the Study's Project Initiation Document (PID) and feasibility study, with support from the Mark Thomas team. As part of this effort, the Mark Thomas team is facilitating a robust and inclusive public engagement process.

This memorandum outlines the Public Engagement Plan (PEP), which provides a strategic framework to guide outreach efforts throughout the Study. The PEP is aligned with the approved Scope of Work and includes the following key tasks:

- Steering Committee Meetings (Task 1.2)
- Development of Property Owner Engagement and Communications Plan (Task 5.1)
- Project Fact Sheets and Materials (Task 5.2)
- One-On-One and Group Meetings (Task 5.3)
- Response to Comments (Task 5.4)
- Project Webpage (Task 6.2)
- Public Engagement Workshops and Tabling Events (Task 6.3)
- Stakeholder Meetings (Task 6.4)
- Summary of Outreach and Response to Comments (Task 6.5)

The PEP is designed to support the development of a community-driven vision for the Study and includes the following components:

- Community Engagement Goals
- Key Stakeholders
- Core Messaging Framework
- Communication and Outreach Tools
- Property Owner Engagement and Communications Plan
- Strategies for Engagement with Underserved Communities
- Outreach Phases, Activities, and Timelines
- Roles and Responsibilities by Consultant Team and Agency Staff

Community Engagement Goals

The public engagement process for the Study is designed to be robust, transparent, and inclusive. It supports the development of the Study by meeting applicable legislative and regulatory requirements, fostering trust, and encouraging meaningful participation through clear and consistent communication with a diverse range of stakeholders. The Mark Thomas team has established the following goals to guide the engagement process:

- **Increase Awareness and Build Consensus**
Raise public and stakeholder awareness of the Study, including its goals, opportunities, and challenges; Facilitate a clear and inclusive process to help the public and stakeholders reach consensus on alternatives and a project moving forward.
- **Engage a Broad Range of Stakeholders**
Collect input from a wide cross-section of the community, including residents, business owners, property owners, community-based organizations, and underrepresented or underserved populations.
- **Ensure Accessible and Inclusive Participation**
Design engagement activities that are easy to understand (avoiding technical jargon), accessible to individuals of all abilities, offered across multiple platforms and venues, and scheduled at varied times to accommodate different needs.
- **Foster Collaboration and Community Support**
Build community and stakeholder support through a collaborative process that encourages active input and participation throughout each phase of the Study.

Key Stakeholders

A wide range of stakeholders has been identified to support a comprehensive and inclusive engagement process for the Study. Stakeholders have been organized into three primary categories: the Steering Committee, Property Owners, and Focused Stakeholder Groups. Additional stakeholders may be identified throughout the duration of the Study's engagement process.

1. Steering Committee

- City of Sonora Council Member
- City of Sonora Mayor
- City of Sonora City Administrator
- City of Sonora Community Development Director
- Tuolumne County District 1 Supervisor
- Tuolumne County Administrator
- Tuolumne County Public Works Director
- Tuolumne County Community Development Director
- Caltrans District 10 Representative from Planning, Local Assistance, and Environmental Support

2. Property Owners

- Property owners within the Study Area (to be identified based on the County Assessor's Parcel Roll)
 - Bureau of Land Management

3. Focused Stakeholder Groups

- Businesses
 - Sonora Chamber of Commerce
 - Tuolumne County Business Council
 - Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce
 - Local businesses located in Downtown Sonora and along Greenly Road
 - Tuolumne County Economic Development
- Community Organizations
 - Tuolumne County Blue Zones
 - Vision Sonora Committee
 - Yosemite Clean Energy
- Emergency and Health Services
 - Tuolumne County Office of Emergency Services
 - Tuolumne County Public Health
 - Adventist Health Sonora (formerly Sonora Regional Medical Center)
 - Sonora Police Department
 - Tuolumne County Sheriff's Office
 - California Highway Patrol
 - Sonora Fire Department
 - Tuolumne County Fire Department
 - Cal Fire
 - Tuolumne Fire Safe Council
- Schools
 - Sonora Elementary School
 - Sonora High School
- Transportation Services
 - Tuolumne Transit
 - Calaveras Connect
 - Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System
- Tribal Governments
 - Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians
 - Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians

Core Messaging Framework

The following messaging framework has been developed to ensure consistent, accurate, and clear communication about the North-South Connector Study across all outreach channels. Messaging will be tailored to inform the public, engage stakeholders, and support a transparent, inclusive planning process.

Project Purpose

The North-South Connector Project aims to establish an alternative north-south corridor that improves emergency evacuation capacity, reduces traffic congestion in Downtown Sonora, and enhances access to essential infrastructure and services. The project also supports improved air quality, climate resilience, and overall community safety.

Key public benefits include:

- Enhanced emergency response and evacuation routes
- Reduced traffic congestion in and around Downtown Sonora
- Improved climate adaptation and transportation system resilience
- Better connectivity to schools, healthcare, and other critical services
- Enhanced multimodal transportation options
- Improved air quality in disadvantaged communities
- Support for the economic vitality of Downtown Sonora

Emergency Response and Community Safety

- The North-South Connector has been identified as a critical evacuation route in the Tuolumne County Evacuation Needs Assessment, addressing gridlock scenarios like those seen during the Washington Fire.
- The project would relieve congestion on SR 49 and downtown Sonora corridors, enabling faster response times for emergency services.
- A 40-foot-wide roadway with controlled vegetation would also serve as a strategic firebreak, protecting nearby neighborhoods such as Browns Flat and Meyer Hills.

Climate Adaptation and Resilience

- Designated as a climate adaptation project, the North-South Connector improves system redundancy and resilience during climate-related events such as wildfires and extreme traffic conditions.
- By reducing idling and congestion, the project is expected to lower vehicle emissions and improve air quality, especially in nearby disadvantaged communities.
- The project supports a shift to more sustainable travel by improving multimodal connectivity and linking to future active transportation infrastructure, including the Gold Rush Shared Use Path.

Opportunities for Public Input

- Community collaboration is central to the development of the North-South Connector. Public input will shape the evaluation of alternatives, identify concerns, and help ensure the project reflects local priorities.

- Multiple outreach opportunities will be available to ensure the process is inclusive, accessible, and transparent.

Communications and Outreach Tools

The Mark Thomas team will utilize a range of communications and outreach tools to inform the public, engage stakeholders, and encourage broad community participation throughout the planning process. These tools are organized into three main categories:

1. Digital Communications

Project Webpage: A centralized hub for project information featuring updates, key documents, meeting materials, and opportunities for public engagement. The webpage will be hosted on a unique website maintained by the Mark Thomas team and updated on a recurring basis. Downloadable resources such as fact sheets, maps, presentations, comment forms, and other engagement tools will be available through the project webpage. The Mark Thomas team will create relevant content and materials for TCTC to approve prior to upload on the webpage.

- **Email Updates (e-blasts):** Regularly distributed emails sent through the TCTC listserv to keep stakeholders informed about project milestones, meetings, and ways to get involved. The Mark Thomas team will expand the distribution email list using contact information collected through public meeting sign-in sheets.
- **Social Media:** Coordinated messaging shared through City, County, and partner channels to boost event participation and share project news. The Mark Thomas team will develop social media content for TCTC to distribute to partner agencies for posting on their respective platforms.

2. Outreach (Printed) Materials

- **Flyers:** Flyers to be distributed both digitally and in-person at community centers, libraries, schools, and other local hubs to promote engagement opportunities. The Mark Thomas team will develop 1-page (8.5"x11") flyers for promoting project meetings or workshops.
- **Public Notice:** Formal announcements shared through local newspapers, the project website, or partner agency websites to ensure broad public awareness of key project milestones, meetings, and opportunities for input. Public notices may also include press releases and other media outreach efforts.
- **Direct Notice:** Letters will be mailed directly to property owners, using addresses obtained from the County Assessor's Roll, to invite them to meetings and events for participation. The letters will include key details such as the project purpose, potential benefits and impacts, timeline, and contact information.

3. Collateral Materials for Engagement Events

- **Project Fact Sheet:** A one-page (8.5" x 11") visually engaging overview of the Study, including the project purpose, goals, timeline, study area, and opportunities for public input. The fact sheet will also include contact information such as email and project website.

- **Community Engagement Presentation:** A PowerPoint presentation used at workshops and stakeholder meetings to explain the Study's objectives, process, and how the public can participate.
- **Display Boards and Infographics:** Large-format graphics used during workshops and tabling events to highlight the Study area, emergency access needs, and potential project benefits. Additional visual materials will be developed by the Mark Thomas team for both in-person and online use to help explain complex project information clearly and effectively.
- **Comment Cards:** Branded cards, both open-ended and prompt-based, used to collect feedback during in-person events.
- **Meeting Sign-In Sheets:** Used at events to track attendance and collect contact information for stakeholders interested in receiving updates.

Property Owner Engagement and Communications Plan

Targeted outreach and early coordination with property owners within the Study Area is critical to the success of the project. The Mark Thomas team will identify property owners using data from the County Assessor's Parcel Roll and compile a list that includes names, parcel numbers, and mailing addresses.

The project team will use a Core Messaging Framework, previously described, to ensure consistency in communications with property owners. In addition, tailored messages will be developed to address specific concerns relevant to this stakeholder group.

Key Messages for Property Owners:

- **Property Access and Impacts Will Be Carefully Considered**
We understand that property owners may have concerns about access, noise, and visibility. The project team is committed to minimizing impacts through careful alignment planning, engineering design, and ongoing coordination with directly affected property owners.
- **No Final Route Has Been Selected—Public Input Will Shape the Project**
The project is still in the early planning phase, and no final alignment has been determined. Public feedback, including direct conversations with property owners, will be critical in shaping feasible alternatives and identifying potential concerns early.
- **Fairness and Transparency in Property Considerations**
If right-of-way is ultimately needed for the project, any acquisition would follow a transparent process guided by state and federal regulations, ensuring fair compensation and respectful engagement with all property owners involved.

Communications

Property owners will be notified by mail using addresses obtained from the County Assessor's Roll. Letters will include key information such as the project's purpose, anticipated benefits and impacts,

timeline, and contact details. These mailings will serve both as invitations to participate and as initial outreach to establish communication channels.

Engagement Strategy

Engagement efforts will focus on both individual and group interactions to provide meaningful opportunities for input and dialogue:

One-on-One Meetings

- **Format:** Virtual and/or in-person (2 days)
- **Target Participants:** Property owners, businesses, and merchants within the Study Area
- **Purpose:** These individual meetings will offer an opportunity for early engagement. The project team will listen to concerns, discuss potential impacts, and collect feedback to inform the development and refinement of project alternatives.

Property Owner Group Meetings

- **Format:** Virtual (12 total)
- **Target Participants:** Property owners, businesses, and merchants within the Study Area
- **Purpose:** Group meetings will serve to share project updates and facilitate open dialogue among stakeholders. These sessions will allow for collective feedback, discussion of alternatives, and identification of common priorities or concerns.

Strategies for Engagement with Underserved Communities

To support a community-driven vision of the Study, targeted outreach will be conducted to ensure inclusive participation to underserved populations.

Tribal Consultation: Early and ongoing consultation will be conducted with tribal communities, including the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians and the Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians. Engagement efforts will ensure that tribal perspectives are meaningfully integrated throughout the planning process.

Senior Population: Approximately 20% of the City of Sonora's population is aged 65 or older. Seniors often face mobility, income, and accessibility challenges, particularly in rural areas. Many rely on fixed incomes and may have limited access to transportation, healthcare, or walkable infrastructure, increasing their risk of social isolation and vulnerability during emergencies. Engagement efforts will be tailored to address these barriers and ensure meaningful participation. For example, workshops and meetings will be scheduled during daytime hours and held at accessible locations near transit services to reduce travel-related burdens and avoid requiring seniors to travel after dark.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Populations: Although LEP populations in Tuolumne County remain relatively small, they represent a growing segment of the community. Upon request, outreach materials such as flyers and display boards can be translated into Spanish to support language accessibility.

In-Person Engagement: Tabling events and workshops will prioritize participation from hard-to-reach and disadvantaged communities by taking place at familiar and accessible locations, including the Sonora Senior Center, Tuolumne County Library, and local school or community centers. These events will be interactive and informative, encouraging meaningful dialogue with participants. Visual aids and collateral materials will be used to help communicate complex project information in a clear and accessible manner.

Promotion: Workshop announcements will be distributed through multiple channels. Digital flyers will be shared with stakeholder groups and local agencies for redistribution through their networks, while hard copy materials will be posted in high-visibility community locations to ensure broad public awareness, particularly among senior residents, tribal communities, and other underserved groups.

Outreach and Engagement Strategy

Engagement Phases

Outreach for the Study will follow a three-phased approach aligned with key milestones in the planning process:

- **Phase 1: Assess Existing Conditions, Challenges, and Needs**
Timeline: August 2025 – December 2025
- **Phase 2: Identify Draft Alternatives**
Timeline: January 2026-May 2026
- **Phase 3: Identify Preferred Alternative**
Timeline: June – September 2026

Engagement Activities

Each engagement activity is tailored to the specific needs and roles of key stakeholder groups. Activities will be scheduled to align with the outreach phases above.

1. Steering Committee Engagement

Format: 8 virtual meetings held bi-monthly throughout the Study

Purpose: Provide guidance on project direction, review technical findings, and shape engagement strategies

Target Participants: Appointed Steering Committee members

Timing: Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3

2. Property Owner Engagement

One-on-One Meetings

Format: Two days of virtual and/or in-person meetings

Purpose: Provide early and personalized engagement; discuss concerns and site-specific issues

Timing: Phase 1

Group Meetings

Format: 12 virtual meetings across all phases

Purpose: Share updates, present alternatives, and foster dialogue about property-specific concerns

Participants: Property owners, business owners, and merchants in the Study Area

Timing: Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3

3. Focused Stakeholder Group Engagement

Format: Up to 6 meetings (virtual, with in-person options)

Purpose: Facilitate in-depth input from key stakeholder groups to ensure stakeholder perspectives are incorporated into the development and evaluation of project alternatives.

Participants: Tribal governments, schools, business representatives, community-based organizations, emergency service providers, and transportation operators

Timing: Phase 1

4. Community At-Large Engagement Public Workshops and Tabling Events

Format: Two In-Person Events

Engagement Options:

- Option 1: One in-person workshop (Phase 1/2) and one tabling event (Phase 3)
- Option 2: Two (2) tabling events

Workshops Features

- Formal presentation by project team
- Interactive exercises (e.g., mapping, voting)
- Direct Q&A with project team

Tabling Features

- Informal engagement at public events (e.g., Second Saturday, Sonora Farmer's Market)
- Focused on reaching a wider audience, particularly those less likely to attend standalone meetings

Engagement Timeline

Engagement Activity	Timeline	Phase
Launch Project Webpage & Fact Sheet	Aug 2025	Phase 1
Steering Committee Meetings (#1–3)	Aug 2025 – Dec 2025	Phase 1
Property Owner One-on-One Meetings	Sept 2025	Phase 1
Property Owner Group Meetings (#1–4)	Sept 2025 – Dec 2025	Phase 1
Stakeholder Meetings (#1–6)	Aug 2025 – Dec 2025	Phase 1
Public Workshop / Tabling Event #1	Feb 2026	Phase 2
Steering Committee Meetings (#4–6)	Jan 2026 – March 2026	Phase 2
Property Owner Group Meetings (#5–8)	Jan 2026 – May 2026	Phase 2

Engagement Activity	Timeline	Phase
Public Workshop / Tabling Event #2	June 2026	Phase 3
Property Owner Group Meetings (#9–12)	June 2026 – Sept 2026	Phase 3
Steering Committee Meetings (#7–8)	June 2026 – Sept 2026	Phase 3

Roles and Responsibilities

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Mark Thomas consultant team, the Tuolumne County Transportation Council (TCTC), and agency staff throughout the planning and implementation of public outreach activities for the Study.

TCTC and agency staff—which include representatives from the City of Sonoma, Tuolumne County, and Steering Committee members—will provide overall project oversight, coordinate with local and regional partners, and review and approve outreach materials.

The Mark Thomas team will lead the development and execution of the public engagement strategy, facilitate outreach activities, and document public input throughout the process. Mark Thomas will coordinate closely with TCTC and agency staff to complete the following key activities:

Engagement Activity	Responsible Party	Task
Steering Committee Meetings	Mark Thomas	Draft meeting agendas and materials
	TCTC	Review and approve meeting agendas and materials
	Mark Thomas	Facilitate up to eight (8) virtual Steering Committee Meetings, including meeting minutes
Property Owner Meetings	Agency Staff/Mark Thomas	Confirm dates and secure locations for two days of in-person meetings
	Mark Thomas	Draft meeting agendas and materials
	TCTC	Review and approve meeting agendas and materials
	Mark Thomas	Facilitate two (2) days of one-on-one property owner meetings; Prepare meeting minutes and engagement summaries
	Mark Thomas	Facilitate up to twelve (12) virtual Property Owner Group meetings; Prepare meeting minutes and engagement summaries
Public Workshops and Tabling	Agency Staff/Mark Thomas	Confirm meeting dates and locations; reserve venues or tabling space as needed
	Mark Thomas	Draft outreach and collateral materials
	TCTC	Review and approve outreach materials

Engagement Activity	Responsible Party	Task
	Mark Thomas	Facilitate up to two (2) public workshops or tabling events and prepare summary of input
Stakeholder Meetings	Mark Thomas	Draft stakeholder invitee list and email invitation language
	TCTC/Agency Staff	Review stakeholder list and distribute invitations
	Mark Thomas	Draft meeting agendas and materials
	TCTC	Review and approve meeting agendas and materials
	Agency Staff/Mark Thomas	Confirm meeting dates and secure venues for in-person meetings, as needed
	Mark Thomas	Facilitate up to six (6) stakeholder meetings (virtual or in-person); Prepare meeting minutes and engagement summaries

Please contact me with any questions – Amber Collins.