

# Connected, Rural, Equitable, and Autonomous Transportation for Everyone (CREATE)

## Draft Public Engagement Plan



February 2024



# Introduction

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## Project Description

Connected, Rural, Equitable, and Autonomous Transportation for Everyone (CREATE, or “the Project”) will pilot the future of advanced transportation technologies in an on-demand transit service (also known as “microtransit”) by leveraging software and automated vehicles (AVs) to provide easier, more reliable, efficient, and equitable access for riders to reach key destinations in the city of Wilson, a rural community in North Carolina.

CREATE will leverage advanced transportation technologies for employees at new job sites, riders with disabilities, and the general public. The Project will enable riders to request and complete safe, affordable, and convenient trips to their desired destinations. Throughout the Project duration, CREATE will build on the success of Wilson’s popular RIDE microtransit service by expanding the existing microtransit service area to include major employment centers and other community hubs, piloting a prescheduling option for riders to secure rides to work shifts, medical appointments, care centers, and for other preplanned trips, and integrating five hybrid electric AVs into the fleet. Riders will be able to select between a conventional vehicle and an AV to complete their trip. Qualitative and quantitative data will be collected and analyzed to better understand rider preferences, behaviors, and perceptions surrounding AVs, particularly as part of an on-demand transit service.

## Applicable Regulations & Legislative Context

*The Advanced Transportation Technology and Innovation (ATTAIN) Program application underscores the regulations and legislation framework governing the application process. As per 23 U.S.C § 503(c)(4), the Secretary of Transportation is empowered to [NS1] “award grants to eligible entities for the deployment, installation, and operation of advanced transportation technologies aimed at enhancing safety, mobility, and overall system performance, as well as fostering intermodal connectivity and maximizing infrastructure return on investment.”*

*No state regulatory or legislative challenges are expected for this deployment. The legislative environment in North Carolina is supportive of AV implementation. The state of North Carolina is ready for AV testing on public roadways following House Bill 469 (S.L. 2017-166). North Carolina even prohibits cities and municipalities from banning or limiting the use of AVs within their boundaries (N.C. G.S. §20-401).*

## Project Timeline

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The Project's deployment has four phases: Phase 0-Planning Administration, Phase 1-Deployment, Phase 2-Data Analysis, and Phase 3-Final Reporting and Closeout. Project tasks are detailed in the Scope of Work (see **Supplemental Materials**).

CREATE's phases are outlined below along with the tasks specific to community engagement.

### **Phase 0 – Planning and Administration**

- Community engagement will begin with rider education, surveys and feedback opportunities, and the launch of a rider app.

### **Phase 1 – Deployment**

- Community engagement will continue with public meetings, participation in community events where May and Via can educate residents about the program, social media promotion, and assorted marketing activities. Community engagement will specifically target groups through events at locations such as the senior center, employment hubs (including the Bridgestone Americas plant and future FedEx distribution center), and programs that support community members with disabilities and connecting with trusted local leaders. This engagement will aim to understand how the program can overcome the challenges and meet the needs of the elderly, shift workers, community members with disabilities, and those without access to a vehicle.

### **Phase 2 – Data Analysis**

- Community engagement will continue outreach to riders through app-based surveys and polling, community surveys to measure the efficacy of marketing and education, and in-person events at easily accessible community locations using printed educational materials as well as printed and electronic surveys. Rider satisfaction surveys and polls will be pushed to users through Via's app. May Mobility will also conduct surveys and host public engagement events during community-wide events.

### **Phase 3 – Final Reporting and Closeout**

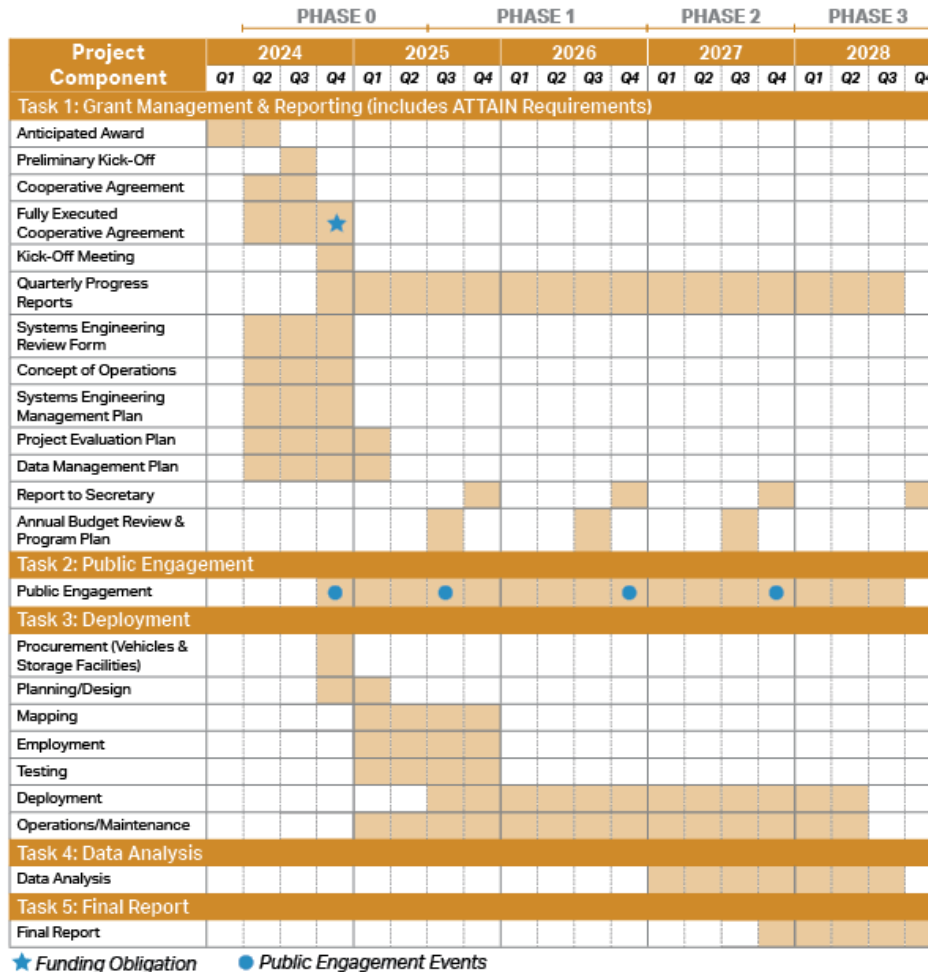
- Community engagement will conclude when Project Partners visit the community to show them how their previous input has influenced the progress of the program and to encourage them to continue to submit additional feedback. This final engagement will demonstrate program accountability to its riders



## Project Schedule

Prior to the obligation of funds, NCDOT will hold a preliminary kick-off meeting, develop project plans, and draft a cooperative agreement.

### PROJECT SCHEDULE



## Public Engagement Goals

As part of the Project, the Project team will seek the involvement of the public and key community stakeholders. The goals and objectives of the CREATE public engagement are to:

### Goals

- Educate the public on the benefits and constraints of AVs and their use in transit services to build understanding and support for the technology.
- Gather community and stakeholder feedback and input to help guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the Project.
- Provide materials and demonstrations on how the public can safely use the AV technology and service.

## Objectives

- Seek public participation from a representative sample of the community within the study area as well as key stakeholders with interest in CREATE, being certain to focus on reaching identified environmental justice and transportation disadvantaged communities.
- Raise awareness and interest in CREATE, including what an Automated Driving System (ADS) is; how it works and where it works best given the maturity level of the technology; and how automated vehicles can help link users to other transit services like Wilson's existing RIDE microtransit service and other regional carriers.
- Demonstrate the safety and ease of using automated vehicles together with transit technology that enables on-demand rides or pre-scheduled trips.
- Address questions and concerns the public may have regarding automated vehicles.
- Gain insight into public expectations and how the public might use automated vehicles in an on-demand transit service or for pre-scheduled trips.
- Document the public engagement process and evaluate the successes and challenges to carry forward to similar projects.

Note: The PEP is a living document that should be updated periodically throughout the program, adjusting to the needs of the community, and keeping notes of engagement completed.

## Key Stakeholders

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With an overall Project goal to connect transportation disadvantaged communities with desired destinations, conversations with entities that have a vested interest in the program are necessary. The Project team will curate an exhaustive list of key stakeholders to engage throughout the life of CREATE.

Key stakeholder groups will include, but are not limited to:

- Current riders: Members of the general public who are current RIDE or other regional transit riders.
- Potential riders: Members of the general and/or voting public who would be interested in riding transit if transit is improved.
- Never riders: Members of the general and/or voting public who are not interested in riding transit, even if the transit is high-quality, but they would support CREATE for its broader community benefits.
- Transportation advocacy groups: Active transportation and transit advocacy groups that have a heightened interest in the function of the entire system.
- General advocacy groups: Environmental, disability, and other community advocacy groups in the greater Wilson area.
- Development community: Members of the community who push for, construct, or manage new development projects across the study area.

- News media: Local and regional media outlets that educate and inform the general public. The Project team will provide information to the news media to support their print and broadcast plans, including connections to other stakeholders to speak as a voice for the Project when requested, and share suggestions/recommendations at scheduled intervals to promote major Project milestones.
- Elected officials: Elected officials, boards, development corporations, and commissions whose constituents will benefit from the Project.
- Business community: Local and regional business community whose employees and customers will benefit from the Project.
- Emergency services: Emergency service providers, including police, fire, and emergency medical services, that may interact with the Project's vehicles, staff, and riders.

## Roles and Responsibilities

The Project's consultant team is responsible for developing all logistics and outreach materials for the public and stakeholder involvement efforts as described below. The consultant team, in partnership with May Mobility, is responsible for ensuring that the branding and styling of the engagement aligns with the guidance of NCDOT. The consultant team will be responsible for any translation services required based on the study area demographics. Finally, the consultant team is responsible for developing and maintaining a schedule that allows for appropriate reviews of logistics and outreach materials by May Mobility and NCDOT.

The planned review process and duration is outlined below:

Activity	Responsible Party	Timeframe
<b>Production</b>	Consultant team	2-4 weeks (deliverable dependent)
<b>Review</b>	CREATE team	1 week
<b>Revisions (round 1)</b>	Consultant team	1 week
<b>Review</b>	CREATE team	1 week
<b>Revisions (round 2)</b>	Consultant team	1 week
<b>Review</b>	NCDOT team	1 week
<b>Revisions (round 3)</b>	Consultant team	1 week
- <b>508-compliance on final English materials</b>	Consultant team	1 week
- <b>Translation</b>		
- <b>508-compliance on final alternative language materials (if required)</b>	Consultant team	1 week
- <b>Build out / finalization of online component</b>		
- <b>Printing for in-person engagement</b>		
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2-3 months for significant engagement activities</b>

NCDOT is responsible for the development, distribution, and timely updates of templates, approved stock photography, preferred iconography, and style guides. NCDOT is also responsible for providing timely reviews and approval of logistics and outreach materials as described in this plan. Additionally, NCDOT is responsible for providing timely requests for information or materials from the CREATE team for use in programmatic communications efforts and for providing marketing collateral for use by the CREATE team.

## Community Description

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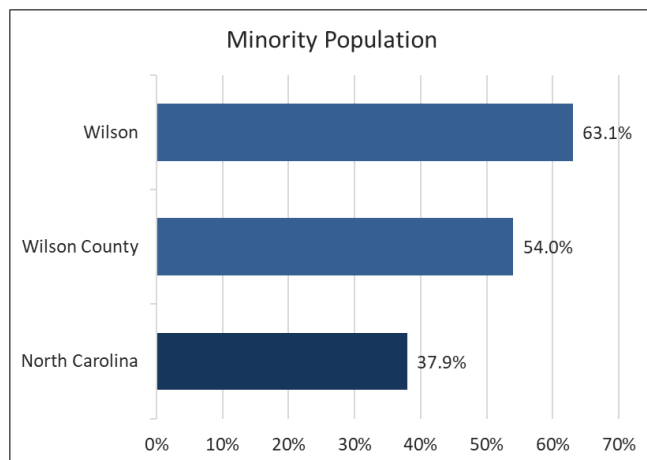
### Demographics Analysis and Findings

The Project's public engagement will be sensitive to the City of Wilson's minority, low-income, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), lower education level, lower internet access, lower vehicle access, younger, and older populations to design and implement transit services that meet defined transportation needs most effectively. All demographics presented below are from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates (2017-2021).

#### 1. Minority

**Finding: A higher percentage of people identify as a traditional minority in the City of Wilson compared to Wilson County and the state.**

Most people living in the City of Wilson (63.1%) identify as a traditional minority (non-white and/or Hispanic). Only one third (36.9%) of the city's population of 47,914 identifies as white and/or non-Hispanic. The city is more racially diverse than Wilson County and the state. Approximately half (54.0%) of the county's population of 78,844 and over one third (37.9%) of the state's population of 10,367,022 identifies as non-white and/or Hispanic.

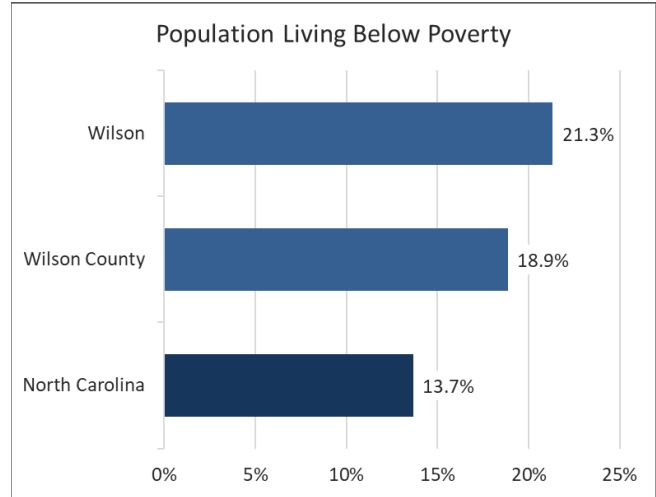




2. Low Income

**Finding: A greater share of people live in poverty in the City of Wilson compared to Wilson County and the state.**

In the City of Wilson, nearly one quarter (21.3%) of people live below the poverty level, 10.8% live under 50% of the poverty threshold, and 16.3% live between 100% and 149% of the poverty level out of a population of 46,558. Less than one fifth (18.9%) of Wilson County's population of 77,448 live below the poverty level, while 8.9% live under 50% of the poverty threshold and 16.1% live between 100% and 149%

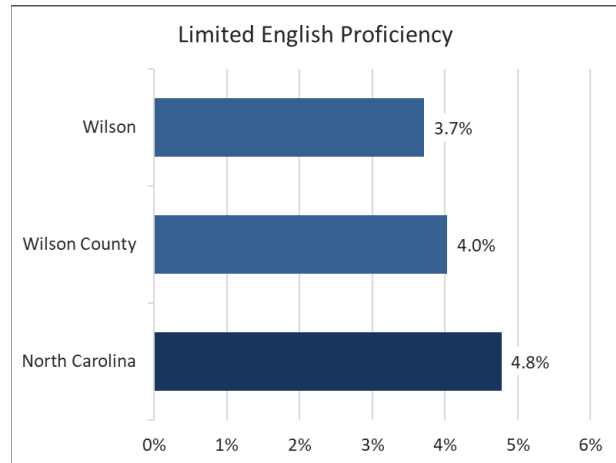


of the poverty level. Compared to the city and county, a smaller proportion of the state's population of 10,092,759 live below the poverty level (13.7%), under 50% of the poverty threshold (6.1%), or between 100% and 149% of the poverty level (9.3%).

3. Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

**Finding: Comparable to Wilson County and the state, a low percentage of the City of Wilson's adult population is Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and most speak Spanish as their primary language.**

Out of a total adult population of 36,510, 2.7% of people living in the city are LEP with Spanish as their primary language, 0.2% are LEP with other Indo-European languages as their primary language, 0.5% are LEP with Asian/Pacific languages as their primary language, and 0.3% are LEP with other languages as their primary language. In Wilson County, 3.3% of people are LEP with Spanish as their primary language, 0.1% are LEP with other Indo-European languages as their primary language, 0.4% are LEP with Asian/Pacific languages as their primary language, and 0.2% are LEP with other languages as their primary language out of a total adult population of 60,582. In the state, 3.3% of people are LEP with Spanish as their primary language, 0.5% are LEP with other Indo-European languages as their primary language, 0.8% are LEP with

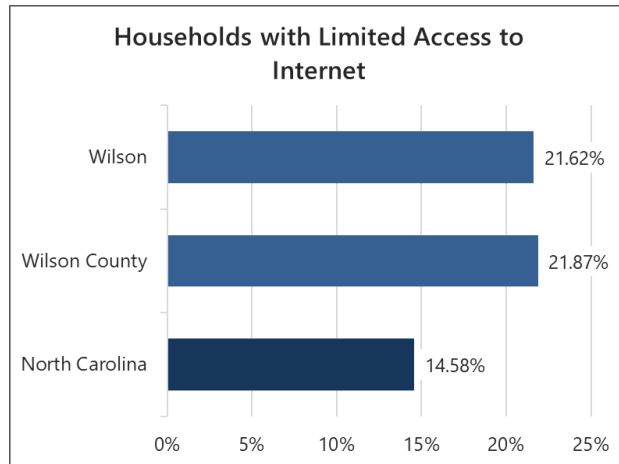


Asian/Pacific languages as their primary language, and 0.2% are LEP with other languages as their primary language out of a total adult population of 8,064,707.

4. Internet Access (broadband/mobile)

**Finding: A greater share of people in the City of Wilson have difficulty accessing the internet compared to Wilson County and the state.**

In the City of Wilson, there are a total of 19,535 households. 4,224 households (21.6%) face limited access to the internet, while 15,311 households (78.4%) have some form of broadband internet access. Additionally, 1,990 households (10.2%) solely rely on a cellular data plan for internet connectivity. In Wilson County, among 31,980 households, 6,993 (21.9%) have limited internet

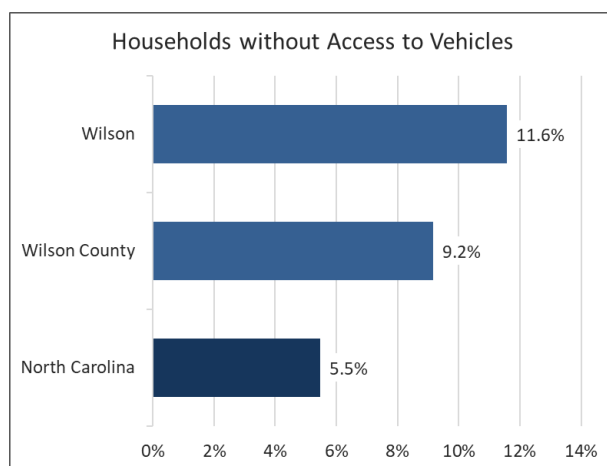


access, while 24,987 (78.1%) possess a broadband internet subscription. Moreover, 3,396 households (10.6%) solely depend on a cellular data plan for internet access. Comparatively, across North Carolina's 4,034,684 households, 588,064 households (14.6%) have limited internet access, while 3,446,620 households (85.4%) have some form of broadband internet subscription. Additionally, 416,578 households (10.3%) solely rely on a cellular data plan for their internet connectivity.

5. Zero Vehicle Households

**Finding: A greater share of people in the City of Wilson and Wilson County have difficulty accessing a personal vehicle compared to the state.**

Among the 19,535 households in the City of Wilson, 11.6% report having no available vehicles, while 39.5% have one vehicle, and 49.0% have two or more vehicles. Among Wilson County's 31,980 households, 9.2% do not have access to a vehicle, 32.4% have one vehicle, and 58.4% have two or more vehicles. Considering North Carolina's broader context of 4,034,684 households, 5.5%

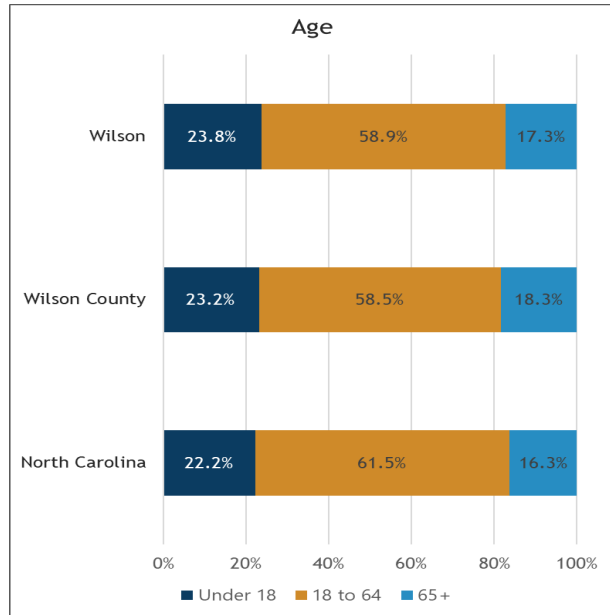


have no available vehicles, 31.3% have one vehicle, and 63.2% have two or more vehicles.

## 6. Age

**Finding: The City of has an age distribution comparable to Wilson County and the state.**

In the City of Wilson, out of a population of 47,914, 23.8% are under 18 years old, 58.9% are aged 18 to 64 years old, and 17.3% are 65 years or older. In Wilson County, out of a population of 78,844, 23.2% are under 18 years old, 58.8% are aged 18 to 64 years old, and 18.3% are 65 years or older. In the state, out of a population of 10,367,022, 22.2% are under 18 years old, 61.5% are aged 18 to 64 years old, and 16.3% are 65 years or older.



## Outreach and Engagement Tactics

Outreach for CREATE will be multifaceted during the planning and implementation phases. Engagement during these phases will be focused on public education on how the AV technology and service will work, how it will connect existing systems, and how potential riders can use the AV service safely and effectively. The Project team will gather feedback from the community and stakeholders to inform where the system needs to fill in existing gap to connect origins and destinations as well as what the community requires to feel comfortable using the system.

The multifaceted approach will be delivered in multiple ways. Below are select communication methods and meeting types that can be deployed to deliver high levels of engagement in ways that will reach the desired broad and targeted audiences.

Summaries of each outreach event will be provided post event. Each event will be documented in this public engagement plan.

## Marketing/Communication Materials

- FAQs
- How to Guides (use the service, download the app, etc.)
- Route Information
- Postcards
- Promotional Flyers
- Signage
- Ads

## Information Campaigns/ Communications Methods

**Communications Subcommittee:** With representation from all project partners, develop plans for branding, marketing, communications, outreach, and education for the project. This group should meet frequently to ensure timely decision-making and production of materials including, but not limited to:

**Social Media:** Leverage the social media accounts of Project partners and stakeholders to spread awareness of Project information and upcoming events. Leverage geofencing and geotargeting to reach desired audiences for information surveys and outreach opportunities.

**Media Relations:** Contact local media outlets to share Project information with the public. Traditional media outlets can reach people who do not have access to or do not frequently use the Internet. The Project team will keep a record of media pieces that reach the public.

**Project Website:** Develop a Project website or webpage to provide detailed, up-to-date Project information. The website should be a one-stop shop for the public and key stakeholders to learn about Project happenings as well as a place to leave comments, ask questions, download the app and take surveys. The Project team's contact information will be included on the website.

**Comment Collection Methods:** Comments collected during meetings, online, or via phone/email will be kept in a comment log that records who made the comment, the comment contents, and the Project team response given if a response is required. The comment log will live throughout the life of the Project.

**Limited English Translation:** When applicable, materials created for the project will be translated into the language identified as LEP.

**Project Videos:** Create Project videos that are short and educational to share with local media and on social media. Topics for these videos may include:

- What is an AV, how does it work, and what are the benefits and constraints of AVs when used for transit?
- How to book an AV ride
- Ride demonstration
- Ride safety

**Ambassador Program:** The Automated Vehicles (AV) Ambassador Program is an in-person user training program to help riders understand the safety and benefits of AVs while helping them access the vehicles properly. Much like with any new technology, new users need help trusting and safely handling it. The AV Ambassador Program will launch at the start of the CREATE service with one ambassador per AV along with one call center operator trained on helping riders of all abilities who may have questions before scheduling a ride. For the second year through the end of the pilot, the program will have only one ambassador who will assist new riders or answer questions and one call center representative. Each ambassador will be hourly paid staff managed by Wilson RIDE. These positions will be paid for through the local coordination budget and will focus on customer service and rider assistance. Each will wear a uniform that will easily identify them to riders and will be able to communicate with the agency operations staff along with emergency services as needed.

## Meeting/Workshop Methods

**Launch Event:** A Media Preview Day and Launch Event will be held within the Project service area to demonstrate the AVs. With assistance from Project partners and stakeholders, this event will be well advertised in the community. Media will be invited to the preview day and the launch event. The launch event will include various stations, including activities like helping people sign up for rides, safety demonstrations, test rides, etc. The event will also offer take home educational materials. The events and activities will be family friendly with food and games to encourage a wide demographic to attend. The event will be held soon after the service is launched so participants can engage with and provide feedback on the service.

Speaking Engagement	Date	Description
Launch Event	Phase 1- Q3 2025	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>

**Interviews:** Individual interviews with Project partners, key stakeholders, and contacts at peer projects will be completed to gather feedback and inform how the Project may better integrate, connect, and serve the community.

Interview	Date	Description
Peer Program	Phase 0- Q4 2024	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>
Transit Partner	Phase 0- Q4 2024	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>
Advocacy Group	Phase 0- Q4 2024	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>



**Emergency Services Workshop & Training:** Following the launch event, the Project team will compile a list of applicable emergency services groups to include in the First Responder training. The Project team will schedule a time for emergency services staff to engage with and learn about the vehicle (if applicable) or let them know the times they can engage with a vehicle while it is in service.

Emergency Services Workshop & Training	Date	Description
Workshop	Phase 1- Q3 2025	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>

**Focus Groups:** Following the launch event, focus groups with different demographics (e.g., the elderly, people with disabilities, families, etc.) will be completed to inform the service or messaging adjustments.

Focus Group	Date	Description
Focus Group #1: Users with Disabilities	Phase 0- Prelaunch	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>
Focus Group #2: Attendees of the Launch Event	Phase 1- Within two weeks after launch	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>
Focus Group #3: Users (3 or more rides) of the service to measure impressions, usability, and capture any other comments	Phase 2- Six months after launch	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>
Focus Group #4 (once a year after launch): Users that regularly use the AVs to inform evaluations of the service including its safety, accessibility, comfort, reliability, convenience, and affordability	Phase 2- One year after launch	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>
Similar to Focus Group #4 with emphasis on comparing the AV service to the Wilson RIDE conventional vehicle service and capturing successes, challenges, and lessons learned	Phase 3- At project close	<i>[Insert description once defined]</i>

## As Needed Engagement

**Speakers' Bureaus/Presentations:** The speakers' bureau simply refers to staff who are trained and ready to go to community meetings to give speeches and present on a given topic. These events can be parent–teacher association (PTA) meetings, city/town councils, church meetings, and other community interest groups wanting to host a speaker. The speakers' bureau will be utilized to share information about CREATE, provide program demonstrations, and continue education on how the Project will be implemented.

**Community Surveys:** Surveys will be used to collect public input on how people currently travel versus how the use of this Project might change the way they travel. Surveys can also be used to offer input on the launch event or to inform what other community needs might be incorporated into the Project. Surveys can be administered online through the Project website or in-person in transit vehicles, at pop-up events, or through door-to-door outreach. Surveys will also continue post program launch through the program app to continue to engage riders and encourage their continued participation and feedback.

**Pop-up Events:** Pop-up events at major destinations or within neighborhoods most likely to use this service are an effective way to reach the audience of users that need this service most. Pop-up events allow for outreach to audiences that may not typically attend a traditional meeting. Pop-ups are a great opportunity to administer surveys and provide educational materials.

**Door-to-Door Outreach:** Door-to-door outreach can be employed in underserved or environmental justice communities to gather input or administer surveys. Door-to-door outreach is a great tool to ensure broad perspectives in the engagement approach. Educational materials can be left behind for people to read about the Project on their own time.

## Feedback and Engagement Evaluation

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As noted in the section above, every outreach opportunity affords the public an opportunity to provide feedback on how the system currently works for them and how the program may better assist them to get to their desired destination. At the beginning of the Project, performance measures will be established for the engagement process, such as target populations that should be engaged, numbers of citizens that are anticipated to participate, and other key measures. After every outreach event, a summary will be prepared that notes who was invited, who attended, a summary of the event plan, a summary of the comments received, and any other data needed to track performance.

In alignment with the data management plan and the equity and accessibility plan, the analytics of who attended versus who was invited will be compared at each stage of the project. Based on the analysis of the performance measures, the project team may adjust the

public engagement plan to improve performance results. An example may be to change the method of invitation of the types of outreach to ensure they reach a diverse audience of potential riders that match the demographics of the service area.

The feedback and comments received will be summarized, and, where applicable, will be used to adjust program elements as the project progresses. It will be key to outline clear expectations for how feedback can be used during specific phases of the program. It will be important for the project team to only ask for feedback that can directly affect the project and explain to the public how that feedback will be used. At the start of each phase, the project team will explain to participants how their feedback from the previous phase informed the current phase and what their current feedback will inform in the next phase. This setting of expectations and reporting back to the community builds trust and encourages the community to continue to share feedback throughout the program.