

CHAPTER 6 COORDINATION AND REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes how the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) involved stakeholders and the public in the coordination necessary to develop the Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan (SRP).

The KYTC actively engaged stakeholders at the earliest stages of the project. Key stakeholders included all railroads operating within the state, as well as rail shippers. Other stakeholders involved were local, regional, and state government staff, elected officials, economic development agencies, special interest and advocacy groups, and the general public. Stakeholder involvement included participation in freight and passenger rail planning activities, identifying the freight and passenger rail priorities and goals for Kentucky, and identifying needs, issues, and potential future investments for rail to ensure improved freight and passenger rail service moving forward.

The KYTC facilitated specific, targeted outreach efforts to encourage participation from key stakeholders. Stakeholders were contacted by email or phone to coordinate individualized interview discussions with key project staff and advisors.

The KYTC then held three in-person public open house meetings at locations throughout the state which were widely promoted via press release, an email list, and social media posts. Attendees at these meetings included rail shippers, economic development agencies, local government staff, elected officials, special interest and advocacy groups, and other interested members of the public. Those who attended the public meetings, as well as those who were unable to attend, were encouraged to complete a detailed on-line survey to provide their opinions on passenger and freight rail service in Kentucky. The on-line survey, offered in both English and Spanish, was left open for 30 days following the final in-person public open house meeting. During that time, the KYTC received 2,847 survey responses. The summary of those responses is included in Appendix B.



Source: Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan Team

Later, the KYTC held a virtual rail stakeholder meeting to review the initial findings of the Draft SRP. The meeting was attended by railroad representatives. The draft results from Chapters 1 and 2 of the SRP were presented, and the stakeholders were provided an opportunity to comment on the document.

A final in-person stakeholder meeting was held in early 2025, in conjunction with a Kentuckians for Better Transportation (KBT) Rail Committee meeting. During the meeting, the Draft SRP chapters were presented, and stakeholders were given an opportunity to provide comments.

A second round of public engagement was also held following completion of the Draft SRP. A virtual open house was held that presented the Draft SRP chapters and provided information about the Rail Plan through a question-and-answer session. The virtual open house was promoted through a press release, social media posts, and on the SRP website. The questions for the question-and-answer session were solicited from the public as part of the meeting promotion. The Draft SRP chapters were uploaded to the SRP website, where comments were accepted via a virtual comment form.

The KYTC continued to solicit input throughout the process via the project website and through ongoing coordination with contacts who participated in the earlier phases of engagement.



Source: Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan Team

6.1. APPROACH TO PUBLIC AND AGENCY PARTICIPATION

This section describes the approach to public and agency participation in the development of the SRP, including public notices, opportunities for public and agency participation, and how comments were collected.

Stakeholder engagement activities were important in order for the project team to understand current rail operations throughout Kentucky and to gain a better understanding of the needs and opportunities that affect various parties who all have a vested interest in rail transportation.

6.1.1. Initial Stakeholder Outreach

In the initial phases of the project, the project team conducted virtual, individualized interviews with primary railroad industry stakeholders, as identified through coordination with the KYTC.

The project team then asked each interviewee a series of questions related to:

- Perceived status of rail infrastructure in Kentucky generally. This question was intended to qualitatively assess the condition of rail infrastructure, operations, and funding in Kentucky while highlighting particular areas of concern on a corridor, project, or policy level.
- Perceived strengths of the KYTC's rail investment programs and perceived limiting factors. This question enabled evaluation of the KYTC's current practices and policies for rail investment.

- Past successes and challenges experienced in implementing investments for rail improvement projects, both for state-owned and privately held assets. This question illustrated through examples how policies and projects intersect through established project delivery practices.
- Concerns or considerations associated with the state and federal policies affecting rail development options within Kentucky. Responses to this question were intended to ensure that the documents address policy shortcomings or provide appropriate policy clarifications.

The overall intent of the stakeholder interview process was to gather information to describe the economic function of rail operations in the state and gain insight into the challenges facing the rail industry in Kentucky from both regulatory and economic perspectives. The project team documented stakeholder interviews by producing detailed meeting notes for internal use.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS COMPLETED

Railroad Representatives

All railroads currently operating in Kentucky were invited to participate in the initial stakeholder outreach phase. Railroad representatives including local management, public projects staff, and government affairs personnel were interviewed in order to gather insight and perspective on current railroad needs and opportunities in Kentucky.

Members of the project team arranged and conducted the interviews. Each potential interviewee received an initial contact email or phone call with details and background about the Kentucky SRP, an explanation of how the interview process would be conducted, and an invitation to participate.

A total of 13 different railroads participated in the confidential, virtual interviews conducted from August through October 2023. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes each.

Freight Shippers

Project team staff identified current freight rail shippers to be interviewed in order to gather insight and perspective on the current state of freight rail service in Kentucky. Members of the project team arranged and conducted the interviews. Each potential interviewee received an initial contact email or phone call with details and background about the Kentucky SRP, an explanation of how the interview process would be conducted, and an invitation to participate. Four Kentucky rail shippers participated in the confidential, virtual interviews in May 2024. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each. Participants included two agricultural shippers, a manufacturer, and a logistics and warehousing provider. Shippers that were interviewed used a mix of Class I, Class II, and Class III railroads, as well as trucks to transport their freight.

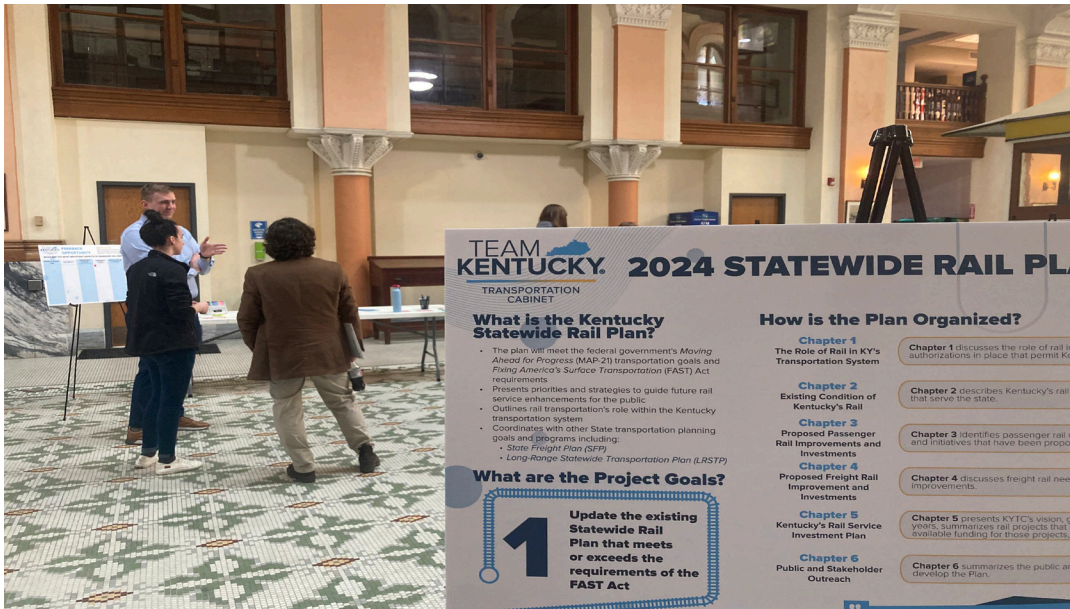
6.1.2. Public and Stakeholder Open House Meetings

After the initial stakeholder engagement phase, the KYTC held three in-person public and stakeholder open house meetings throughout the state to support the development of the SRP in Fulton, Louisville, and Ashland, Kentucky. Details of these meetings are provided in the sections below.

At each of the three open house meetings, the project team presented information about the purpose of state rail planning, the FRA requirements for state rail plans, an overview of the history and existing

conditions of the rail network in Kentucky, and a discussion of current needs and opportunities related to rail. A picture from the open house meeting held in Louisville at Louisville Union Station on March 12, 2024, is included as **Figure 6-1** below.

Figure 6-1. Open House Meeting



Source: Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan Team

Meetings and communications were designed to facilitate participation and foster meaningful engagement. The format of the meeting was an open house setting allowing attendees to work through the various stations at their own pace. Project team members, including both KYTC and consultant staff, were available for questions and small discussions. All meeting attendees were encouraged to complete the on-line survey, and tablet computers were provided to allow attendees to complete the survey while at the open house. The results of the survey are shown in Appendix B.

6.1.3. Draft State Rail Plan Workshop

Following the preparation of the Draft SRP, the KYTC held two additional virtual meetings to present the findings of the draft plan and solicit further input from stakeholders and the public. Prior to the meeting, the Draft SRP was published on the project website and open to comment and feedback. During the meeting, the KYTC and project team answered previously submitted questions and talking points. Questions that were asked on the website or during either virtual meeting were cataloged and later addressed and published on the project website for viewing.



Source: Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan Team

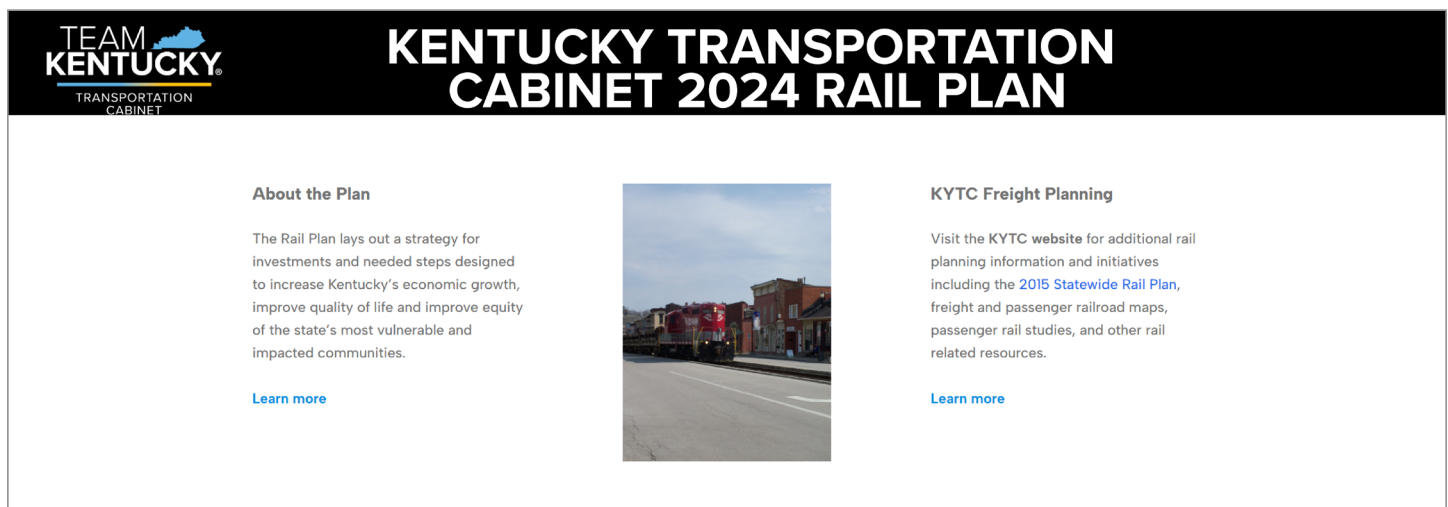
The two public meetings were held in conjunction with the annual Kentuckians for Better Transportation (KBT) Conference in January 2025. At the conference the project team presented key themes from each chapter of the Draft SRP and public engagement process and placed Kentucky’s current rail needs and opportunities in the context of the multiple targeted federal funding opportunities available from 2022 through 2026 due to the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The project team emphasized that this update to the rail plan is a tool that the KYTC and other stakeholders can use to strategize how best to leverage funding opportunities available over the next four to five years.

6.1.4. State Rail Plan Website

A project webpage (kyrailplan.com, shown in **Figure 6-2** below) served as an online information center for all potential stakeholders by providing ongoing information about the Kentucky SRP process and progress.

The website included information related to the goals and objectives for the state rail planning process, the timeline for plan development, existing documents and resources, event details, contact information, and a comment form. The website hosted links to the survey during the initial round of public engagement and the virtual open house during the second round of engagement. The website also included a tool for members of the public to sign up for a mailing list for project updates and other information.

Figure 6-2. State Rail Plan Website

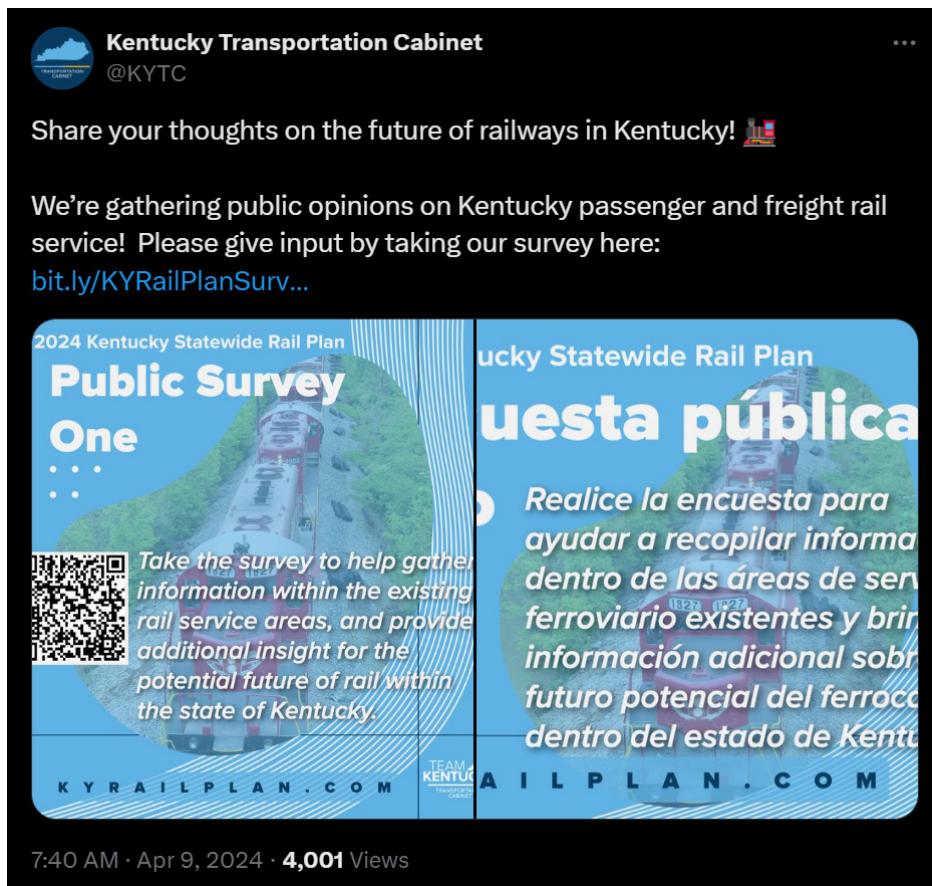


6.1.5. Social Media Promotion

Public engagement opportunities, including in-person meetings and workshops and the virtual open house, were promoted via the KYTC’s official social media accounts on Facebook, X, and LinkedIn.

Example X posts are shown in **Figure 6-3** below.

Figure 6-3. Social Media Promotion



6.2. COORDINATION OF STATE RAIL PLAN WITH NEIGHBORING STATES

The KYTC is in regular contact with neighboring state partners. Neighboring state DOTs, including Tennessee, Indiana, and Ohio, were invited to review a draft of the Kentucky SRP and provide comments prior to its finalization.

6.3. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION DURING PREPARATION AND REVIEW

Railroads, rail shippers, public entities within the state, units of local government, and other interested parties were involved in the preparation and review of the SRP.

The project team initially identified and contacted key stakeholders and industry representatives early in the information-gathering phase of the project. Later, the team invited representatives of the railroads operating in the state, staff from federal and state agencies, local and regional governments, regional railroad authorities, and general public groups (including advocacy organizations interested in passenger rail) to participate in the next phases of the engagement process. Meetings and communications were designed to facilitate participation and foster meaningful engagement.

6.4. ISSUES RAISED DURING THE PREPARATION OF THE STATE RAIL PLAN

During both stakeholder and public outreach activities, input from these groups were collected via surveys, comment forms, and meeting notes. Key themes from stakeholder and public comments are summarized below.

6.4.1. Key Themes from Stakeholder Discussions

- Railroads would find it helpful if Kentucky offered financial assistance to shortline railroads similar to what the adjacent states of Tennessee and Ohio provide. (Note: beyond this suggestion, railroads had limited requests for state government changes to help their operations.)
- A significant challenge facing many shippers is the reduction in service frequency and reliability of Class I railroads.
- Shippers desire to increase their use of rail shipping but are constrained by a combination of infrastructure and rail service availability.

6.4.2. Public Comments Received

The majority of the public comments received were related to passenger rail services and were obtained from the on-line survey. Full results of the survey are included in the appendix to this chapter.

- Amtrak users commented that more frequent or better-timed service would increase ridership.
- Improvements are needed to the existing Amtrak station in Fulton, Kentucky.
- There is a desire for new passenger rail service to numerous regional destinations.
- There is a desire for new commuter rail service within Kentucky.



Source: Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan Team

6.5. INCLUSION OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE STATE RAIL PLAN

Recommendations made by participants such as railroads, agencies, authorities, and municipalities were appropriately considered and presented in the SRP. Specifically, current and future projects identified by stakeholders formed the basis for the State's updated project inventory presented in Chapter 5. The state rail planning process provided a venue for these potential projects to be identified and documented. The project concepts that are included in the SRP may potentially be eligible for future funding opportunities. Inclusion of a project in the SRP is an eligibility requirement for some federal funding programs and serves as an important indicator of project readiness.

6.6. STATE COORDINATION OF STATE RAIL PLANNING WITH OTHER TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROGRAMS

The state coordinates statewide rail planning with other transportation planning programs and activities of the state and metropolitan areas. The KYTC Division of Planning administers the State's rail programs and serves as the KYTC's railroad liaison. Rail management responsibilities within the KYTC are divided between the Division of Planning and the Division of Right of Way and Utilities. The SRP informs and is informed by the State's other transportation planning documents, including the Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan (LRSTP), the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP), and the Kentucky Freight Plan (KFP).

The KYTC will consider all relevant and applicable federal laws, regulations, policies, and Executive Orders related to equity considerations or establishing/supporting equitable practices in the management of state rail programs and implementation of rail projects within the state.



Source: Larry / Adobe Stock