

WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting No. 1

Meeting Information

Friday, September 12, 2025, from 11:30 – 1:30 PM

Whittier City Offices: 660 Whittier Street, Whittier, Alaska

The meeting was also available via Microsoft Teams for those who could not attend in-person.

Purpose:

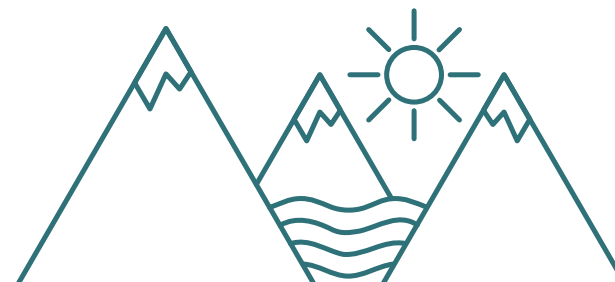
Gather Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) input on transportation issues and needs in Whittier and explore potential solutions.

Planning Team Attendees:

Scott Maybrier	DOT&PF, Project Manager
Judy Chapman	DOT&PF, Deputy Director of Planning
Romorenzo Marasigan	DOT&PF, Kenai Area Planner
Gordon Burton	DOT&PF, Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel Facilities Manager
Renee Whitesell	DOWL, Senior Project Manager
Kendal Ramage	DOWL, Transportation Planner
Talli Vittetoe	DOWL, Public Involvement
Adison Spafford	City of Whittier, Assistant City Manager
Dave Borg	City of Whittier, Harbor Master
Maija DiSalvo	RESPEC, Community & Regional Planner (Virtual)

Technical Advisory Committee & Attendees:

Ben White	DOT&PF, Central Region Planning Lead (Virtual)
Eli-Keston-Brackett	DOT&PF, Project Assistant (Virtual)
Dan Blair	City of Whittier, Mayor
Kris Erchinger	City of Whittier, Finance Director (Virtual)
Rachel Swain	Whittier Community Member
Nick Olzeknak	Whittier Community Member



WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



Griff Berg	USFS Chugach National Forest, Technical Services Staff Officer (Virtual)
Chris Stewart	USFS Chugach National Forest, District Ranger
Kristen Smith	Prince William Sound Economic Development District, Executive Director (Virtual)
Cody Hanna	Phillips Cruises, Vice President (Virtual)
Johnny Whelan	Phillips Cruises, Operations Manager
Katherine Carlton	Chugach Alaska Corporation, President
Jack Blackwell	Chugach Alaska Corporation, Vice President of Lands & Resources
Kathleen Ashton	Holland America/Princess, Alaska Transportation Director
Brita Hamre	Alaska Municipal League, Senior Planner
Meghan Clemens	Alaska Railroad Corporation, Director of External Affairs
Tor Wallen	Huna Totem, Whittier Terminal Manager (Virtual)

Twenty-six (26) people attended the meeting, including ten (10) members of the planning team.

Meeting Summary

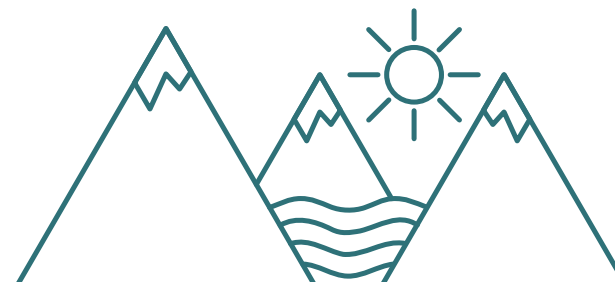
Presentation

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in coordination with the City of Whittier (Whittier), hosted the first Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting for the Whittier Moves Transportation Master Plan (Whittier Moves). Renee Whitesell, DOWL Senior Project Manager, began the presentation by introducing the planning team members and having in-person and online participants share their name, role, and interest in Whittier's transportation system. Participants were reminded that their purpose is to provide guidance and feedback on analysis, review plan documents such as the forthcoming Existing Conditions Report, and help advance recommended projects beyond the planning process into design, funding, and construction.

Tunnel Presentation

Gordon Burton, DOT&PF Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel Facilities Manager, shared an overview of the tunnel, which is the primary access route to and from Whittier. Key points included:

- Alternating vehicle and train traffic in half-hour intervals, as it is shared between Alaska Railroad and highway traffic
- Longest tunnel in North America at 13,300 feet (2.5 miles)
- Among the first tunnels to use jet fans, safe houses with separate ventilation, and a computerized regulation of both rail and highway traffic



WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



- Designed to withstand extreme conditions, including negative 40-degree temperatures, 150 mile-per-hour (mph) winds, and avalanches
- Buildings at each portal are constructed to manage heavy snow loads and avalanche impacts
- Traffic peaks in July and drops to its lowest levels in December and January
- Cruise ships account for roughly 25 percent of annual tunnel traffic, with 2020 being the lowest year due to suspended operations
- Recent years show modest growth and shift in traffic mix (vehicles, buses, boats), the current year will provide new data as multiple cruise ships are now docking in Whittier with the recent construction of the Huna Totem cruise ship terminal

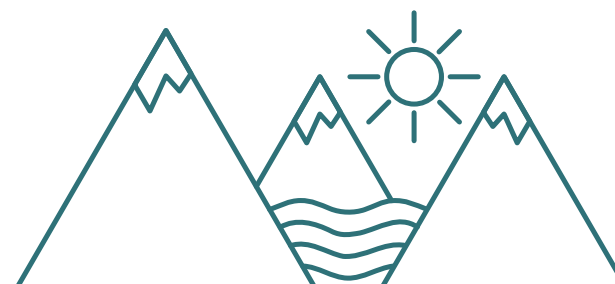
One participant asked whether the opening of the new cruise ship terminal has created capacity issues in the tunnel. Gordon responded that traffic patterns have shifted, though it is still too early to determine the true impact. Cruise companies adjusted their schedules to align with optimal tunnel openings, avoiding major conflicts with rail traffic. To manage bus volumes, tunnel operators sometimes borrow unused rail time, allowing larger groups of buses to pass through. Each bus is treated as equivalent to roughly 30 cars due to required safety spacing, which ensures tunnel occupancy remains within safe house capacity.

A follow-up question asked whether tunnel traffic counts reflect the number of vehicles or the number of passengers. Gordon responded that data reflects vehicles only. The figures are one-way counts, not round trips, so totals would double if both directions were included. In addition to total vehicle numbers, data is also available by vehicle class, which has been useful for understanding traffic composition.

Whittier Moves Overview

Renee Whitesell continued by providing an overview of what transportation master planning is and how it applies to Whittier Moves. A transportation master plan establishes a long-term vision, typically looking 20 years ahead, for how a community's transportation system should grow and improve. It begins with documenting existing conditions across all modes of transportation and then considers how future changes in population, business activity, and economic development will shape transportation needs. From there, the plan draws from the existing conditions and community input to establish a vision for the future system and set out the goals, objectives, and priorities needed to create a transportation network that is safer, more accessible, and better connected, while also supporting economic growth and addressing environmental concerns.

Renee emphasized that transportation master planning is a process that requires broad community and stakeholder input. It is not a plan created behind closed doors. Instead, it relies on community involvement to allow buy-in and, ideally, consensus about the right opportunities. The process also provides a coordinated framework that can be updated over time as needs evolve. A transportation master plan is not a detailed construction plan or a short-term to-do list. It is also not a guarantee that every idea or project will be funded or built, especially given the uncertainty surrounding future state and federal transportation funding.



WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



The planning area for the Whittier Moves includes the downtown area as well as areas beyond city boundaries that affect how people and goods move in and out of the community. While much of the focus is on Whittier itself, the plan also considers connections to Whittier's Shotgun Cove Road project and other areas where future growth or activity may influence transportation needs.

Work on the plan began earlier this year with field investigations and documentation of existing conditions, including close observation of facilities such as the tunnel and other infrastructure. With that baseline nearly complete, the plan is now moving into the needs analysis phase. This step involves reviewing what has been observed, incorporating public feedback, and identifying early project ideas. The TAC will help prioritize these opportunities and assist in identifying the top five transportation infrastructure priorities through facilitated exercises and discussions.

Following this phase, the planning team will prepare a public review draft of the transportation master plan, which is anticipated to be shared for broader public review and feedback. The final transportation master plan is scheduled for completion in summer 2026, providing DOT&PF, City of Whittier, and partner organizations with a clear roadmap to guide funding, design, and implementation of transportation improvements.

Whittier serves as a hub for tourism, freight, rail, and the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) through its ferry terminal. The community also has a strong military legacy that shaped its land ownership patterns and left behind structures like the Buckner building, which is city-owned and currently derelict. The City is considering opportunities to repurpose the land currently occupied by the Buckner building in the future. At the same time, Whittier faces many challenges. The city is constrained by narrow geography, limited land, and the one-way tunnel. Despite these limitations, Whittier continues to attract visitors. Its two cruise ship terminals, day cruises, wildlife, and recreation opportunities draw both tourists and Alaskans who come to enjoy the area. Cruise ship docks and activities are bringing more visitors, while improved facilities for tourism, shopping, and transportation-staging are still needed. The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) is pursuing freight growth with new facilities for containers, break bulk, and other cargo. The city-owned small boat harbor is also in high demand.

Whittier Moves seeks to establish a transportation vision that supports Whittier's long-term goals and land use priorities. The plan will also explore funding options to support projects and include a practical implementation strategy with short, medium, and long-term actions. Finally, the plan will promote multimodal and intermodal connectivity.

What We've Heard

Renee highlighted that public input has been gathered through surveys, information booths, and open houses. From this input, several key themes have emerged:

- Safety
- Tunnel Access/Delays
- Maintenance and Ownership
- Parking
- Wayfinding/Signage
- Community Access

Renee invited the TAC to review the themes and identify anything else that should be included.



WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



One participant emphasized that the success of Whittier Moves depends on addressing fragmented land ownership. Much of the land is currently divided between ARRC and Whittier, which complicates implementation. They noted that Whittier is in discussions with ARRC to take possession of certain nonessential lands covered under the master lease. Converting these parcels into City ownership would make it easier to carry out the goals and priorities identified in the plan. Renee expressed appreciation for the clarification.

Another participant agreed with the identified themes but suggested that visitor access could be more clearly recognized. They noted that while community access is important, boaters and winter users often lack a defined place to go. The boat launch is the default destination, but the experience often feels disorganized and time consuming. Better signage and wayfinding would help, but the participant emphasized the need for designated spaces for visitor access, along with clearer parking options for trailers, snow machines, and other vehicles.

Renee thanked the participant for their feedback and continued with a breakdown of feedback received by user group, starting with Whittier residents. Residents highlighted several concerns, including poor road and sidewalk conditions, potholes, and challenges with winter maintenance. Parking congestion and limited availability were also identified as major issues, along with delays at railroad crossings and the restrictions of the tunnel schedule. The small Whittier airstrip was noted as having limited and inconsistent infrastructure, with seasonal maintenance needs.

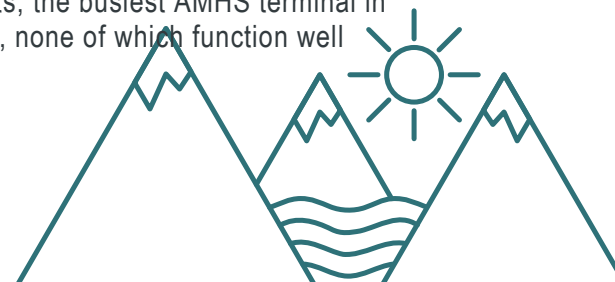
Residents also offered a range of ideas and potential solutions. These included adjusting tunnel hours, expanding the use of rail to move additional cruise passengers, creating shuttle services to better connect cruise ports, the harbor, and the town, and strengthening coordination with the City to address land ownership and management challenges.

One participant expressed enthusiasm about the public feedback, noting that it closely reflects the issues raised by community members and visitors alike. They emphasized the importance of maintaining roads and addressing potholes, acknowledging the challenges of winter maintenance while suggesting that Whittier has potential to be more active year-round. They also highlighted the need for improved parking and clearer signage, explaining that even locals sometimes struggle to give visitors accurate directions.

Another participant agreed that Whittier should not be viewed as a seasonal community. They noted that the city is active year-round with unique winter recreation opportunities, but access and services in the off-season remain limited. Better signage, parking, and sidewalk infrastructure were identified as important needs to improve safety for both residents and visitors, especially in busy areas like the boat launch and commercial district.

They also highlighted the problem of “tunnel anxiety,” where visitors feel pressured to cut their time in Whittier short to catch a tunnel opening. They suggested that expanded tunnel hours and greater use of rail service could reduce this pressure, encouraging visitors to stay longer, spend more time in local businesses, and enjoy more of what Whittier has to offer.

One participant described the high congestion and safety conflicts near the launch ramp, where multiple uses converge. This area includes the boat launch, tourists, the busiest AMHS terminal in Southcentral Alaska, heavy truck traffic, and the pedestrian tunnel, none of which function well



WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



together. The participant suggested that relocating one of the major players (specifically the AMHS terminal) to Emerald Cove could significantly reduce congestion, allow for the extension of the pedestrian tunnel away from truck traffic, and improve safety. This move could also create more parking, support new business opportunities, and provide stronger year-round access since AMHS operates throughout the winter.

Another participant echoed the importance of improved signage. They explained that the Economic Development District developed a wayfinding sign plan a few years ago. That effort identified key traffic junctions where signage could be clearer. The participant shared this previous work with the planning team.

One participant noted the recent completion of the ARRC's Whittier Terminal Master Plan focused primarily on freight operation. They explained that delays are difficult to avoid while balancing operations with customer needs. The Terminal Master Plan includes the concept of a grade-separated crossing, and ARRC has also submitted a federal grant application to raise the ceiling clearance in the nearby Portage rail tunnel. This improvement would allow double-stack container trains, which could reduce delays at the Whittier crossing and improve freight efficiency.

A highway-only tunnel has been a popular topic amongst residents and visitors. One participant cautioned that constructing a highway-only tunnel would be a very long-term undertaking, likely taking 15 to 20 years once environmental reviews, planning, and design are considered. Even acquiring a boring machine could take five to eight years. For that reason, they emphasized the importance of focusing on short- and mid-term improvements that can deliver benefits sooner.

Another participant agreed, noting that Whittier has a history of setting long-term goals without always achieving them. They encouraged the group to prioritize small, achievable improvements that can have an immediate impact on safety and accessibility. They pointed to the consistent feedback around creating better facilities for non-motorized travel and clearer wayfinding, both of which could reduce congestion and improve safety. They also suggested using Whittier's captive audience at the tunnel, cruise docks, ferry terminal, and train platform as an opportunity to educate visitors and engage them in wayfinding and pedestrian safety efforts. Renee thanked participants for their comments.

Project Development, Prioritization, and Evaluation

Renee introduced the prioritization matrix as a tool for evaluating and sorting potential improvement opportunities. The matrix divides opportunities into four categories: "Quick Wins," "Major Projects," "Fill-Ins," and "Future Evaluation." This approach allows the planning team and TAC to consider both the level of effort required and the potential impact of each project. Quick wins are low-effort, high-impact improvements that can be implemented more easily, while major projects require more detailed planning, cost estimates, and design. Fill-in projects are smaller improvements with limited impact, and projects placed in future evaluation may need additional study or depend on other improvements being made first.

This process is designed to be data-driven and transparent, while also giving stakeholders a chance to compare ideas, hear each other's perspectives, and build consensus around priorities. As part of an activity, TAC members broke into small groups to review 12 high-level improvement opportunities



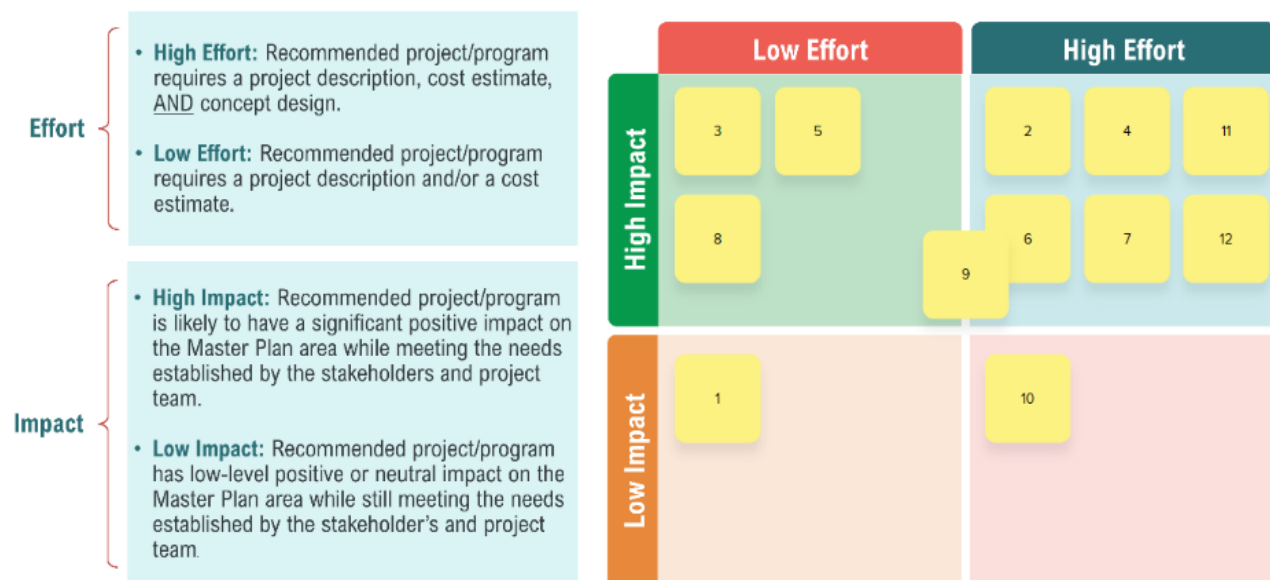
WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



identified through the public survey and placed them on the prioritization matrix. They were also encouraged to suggest additional project opportunities not included on the initial list. Online participants completed the same exercise virtually.

Following the small group discussions, participants reconvened to review results and reach consensus on where each opportunity should be placed within the matrix. The projects and matrix shown below summarize the outcome of that discussion.

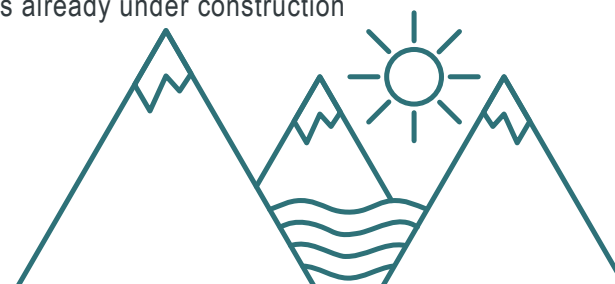
Prioritization Matrix



- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Review fees & taxes | 7. Explore major infrastructure |
| 2. Upgrade harbor facilities | 8. Expand shuttle service |
| 3. Improve navigation infrastructure | 9. Upgrade roadways |
| 4. Expand recreation access | 10. Reschedule freight rail |
| 5. Encourage local business & mixed land use | 11. Increase cruise passenger rail use |
| 6. Adjust tunnel operations | 12. Improve City & landowner coordination |

Identified Opportunity Discussion

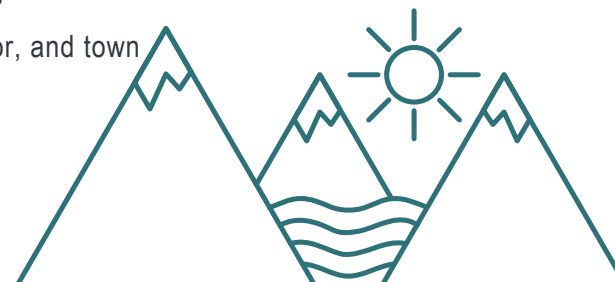
1. **Review fees and taxes:** tunnel, harbor, parking, and local tax structures
 - a. Limited movement expected, as Whittier has little flexibility
 - b. No local authority over the tunnel, and the harbor is already under construction



WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



- c. Identified by many participants as a challenging issue to address
- 2. **Upgrade harbor facilities:** slips, launches, staffing, signage, staging
 - a. Capital funding requires significant time and effort to secure
 - b. Construction is not a quick fix and will take longer to deliver
 - c. Clear project definitions are important for setting priorities and expectations
- 3. **Improve navigation infrastructure:** walkways, wayfinding, info centers
 - a. Inflation and previous efforts already completed are factors to consider
 - b. Many opportunities remain that are less costly to implement
 - c. These projects can provide strong value
- 4. **Expand recreation access:** scenic roads, trails, and outdoor amenities
 - a. Trails and recreation are major draws for visitors to Alaska, and Whittier is well known for these opportunities
 - b. Trail projects often rely on grants and volunteers for funding and maintenance
 - c. Recreational access is a priority for Trinity Point and Portage Pass, with a scoping study for Portage Pass and a site development plan for Trinity Point now being finalized
- 5. **Encourage local business and mixed land use:** transition harborside parking/storage to land for businesses
 - a. Some projects could be low effort / high impact by leveraging existing code and infrastructure
 - b. Opportunities exist for more businesses to participate in economic development, though many have not yet had the chance
 - c. Important to prioritize projects that already have completed plans and potential funding sources
- 6. **Adjust tunnel operations:** extended/flexible hours, traffic by mode, resident/commuter priority
 - a. Potentially scalable, but infrastructure improvements and tunnel enhancements would require significant investment
 - b. These projects would likely deliver high impact but come with high costs
- 7. **Explore major infrastructure:** gondola, traffic-only tunnel, relocating ferry terminal
 - a. Support for the ideas presented
 - b. If implemented, could create world-class outcomes
- 8. **Expand shuttle service:** link cruise terminals, train, harbor, and town



WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



- a. Adding a shuttle service would be simple, though its overall reach is uncertain and weather-dependent
- b. Could add parking and reduce pedestrian-vehicle conflicts
- c. Train boarding creates congestion; more specific schedules could help spread out passenger flow
- d. Improving local circulation could capture more of this economic opportunity

9. Upgrade roadways: lanes, crossings, maintenance, enforcement

- a. A significant portion of the effort will come from identifying and securing funding
- b. A coordinated maintenance plan is both achievable and necessary, regardless of project scale or impact

10. Reschedule freight rail: shift to off-peak hours

- a. Limited options remain for rescheduling freight rail; impacts from terminal operations are already being mitigated as much as possible
- b. The rail line is state-owned but excluded from state operating funds
- c. The primary value to customers is efficiency and cost-effectiveness; significant operational changes could reduce efficiency and undermine that value

11. Increase cruise passenger rail use: reduce bus/motorcoach reliance

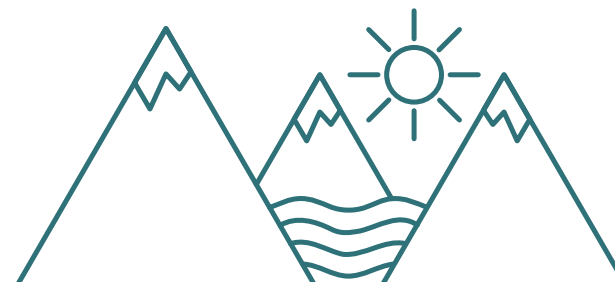
- a. Strong interest in increasing passenger rail capacity, but acquiring a new rail car is extremely difficult and costly
- b. Partners are exploring alternative rail car options, but even in the best case, availability is at least five years out
- c. Quickly moving visitors out of Whittier can hurt local businesses; multiple train departures, rather than a single departure, could create a better balance between efficiency and community benefit

12. Improve city and landowner coordination

- a. Master lease between the Alaska Railroad and the City creates communication challenges

Other Opportunities Identified:

- Completion of Shotgun Cove Road
- Railroad Terminal Master Plan
- Alaska Marine Highway System



WHITTIER MOVES TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN



Next Steps and Closing Comments

Renee closed with appreciation for the TAC's engagement and contributions. The planning team emphasized that this was the first gathering of the group and that members will be invited back for another meeting early next year. In the meantime, participants were encouraged to share any additional ideas with the team by email. Before adjourning, the team invited members to join additional engagement activities scheduled for later that day, including a student engagement workshop and a public open house at the Whittier school gym.

