

ADVANCING TRANSPORTATION EQUITY



District 1
October 2020



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Executive summary

As part of its 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) seeks to better understand how transportation affects and is affected by equity. Beginning in 2017, MnDOT launched district-specific community conversations to inform equitable transportation planning and practice. Through this initiative, MnDOT has engaged in conversations with a wide variety of groups, agencies, and organizations (referred to in this report collectively as “organizations”) that work with and represent underserved communities in Minnesota.

As of summer 2020, MnDOT had coordinated in-person conversations between its staff and representatives from community organizations in Districts 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8. These community conversations help MnDOT develop a deeper understanding of the people it serves, determine which key communities it needs to learn more about, and identify organizations interested in transportation equity.

The conversations in District 1, as well as the other districts, covered a wide range of topics that enhance MnDOT’s understanding of transportation’s role in people’s lives and the opportunities or barriers people face based on available transportation modes. MnDOT will work internally and at the district level to implement changes based on findings from the transportation equity studies and also intends to share these District 1 findings with partners to help inform their work.

Methods for the study

In District 1, out of the 45 organizations contacted for this initiative, MnDOT engaged in 32 community conversations with representatives from 34 organizations serving or representing key communities. Each organization had strong ties to the key communities identified for this project. MnDOT engaged with communities:

- Currently **underrepresented** in transportation decision-making processes
- Experiencing **known inequities** in transportation access or outcomes
- Facing **unique transportation needs** not addressed well by current approaches

Teams of two interviewers met community representatives in person, asked questions using an interview guide, and asked follow-up questions as appropriate.

Themes and findings

Several themes emerged from the community conversations in District 1, including that transportation is deeply connected with other aspects of life such as employment, health care, social services, housing, and recreational activities. The available modes of transportation in District 1 both create and limit access to jobs, school activities, medical appointments, counseling and other support services, social and cultural events, and shopping at grocery stores and other retail establishments.

The themes from the District 1 transportation equity initiatives are summarized below and discussed further in later sections of the report.



People and community connections

Participants in the conversations often highlighted how transportation access affects the communities they represent and work with. The D1 community conversations identified the following important points about key communities and transportation:

- **People with low incomes:** Without a private vehicle, it is difficult to access jobs, grocery stores, pharmacies, medical appointments, and social and community activities. However, alternative options to owning a vehicle, such as public transit and ride-hailing services, are limited in District 1, especially outside of the Duluth area.
- **Rural residents:** Long distances between destinations in rural areas make travel difficult. Regional transit service for rural areas is limited in terms of places served, frequency of service, and hours of operation.
- **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color:** Participants noted concerns with transportation challenges and inequities, a lack of diversity among transportation decision-makers and at public transportation meetings, and different treatment by transportation providers of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color compared with white people.
- **People with disabilities:** Participants mentioned a range of transportation challenges, including poor access to sidewalks, difficulties with transit travel, and transportation providers unwilling or unable to assist people who use wheelchairs. Most participants who commented about transportation challenges for veterans focused on veterans with disabilities and difficulties they face traveling to jobs and health services.
- **Older adults:** Some older adults with declining vision or other physical limitations need transportation to health care providers, stores, and social activities, and they have limited options for curb-to-curb or door-to-door assistance outside of informal arrangements with family and friends.
- **Youth:** Some young people have only limited transportation options and consequently miss programs, events, and social occasions, including activities in school districts where after-school bus service is not available.
- **Women and girls:** Participants noted transportation problems for women and girls. They are less likely to walk or bicycle because they may be afraid for their safety, some are trapped in abusive relationships because they lack access to transportation they need to seek relief and shelter, and some pregnant women in rural areas face challenges getting to hospitals and clinics with obstetric services.



Transportation and infrastructure barriers

The transportation modes available in District 1 create and limit opportunities for members of the key communities.

- **Private vehicles:** Personal vehicles are the preferred or most critical mode of transportation for the key communities, but some people cannot afford to own and operate them. Some depend on personal vehicles owned by family and friends for transportation.

- **Public transit:** Public transit is critical for many community members, and most participants said the current level of transit in District 1 falls short of what is needed to meet needs. Difficulties include limited hours of operation, infrequent service, long wait and travel times, and the fees charged to use transit services.
- **Walking and bicycling:** Many community members walk in order to access basic needs and services, especially during the warmer months. Some bicycle, too. Barriers to both walking and biking include safety concerns about high vehicle speeds and traffic volumes, winter weather, a lack of infrastructure or inadequate maintenance of existing infrastructure, and physical limitations that rule out walking or biking for some people.
- **Other transportation modes:** Community members use a range of additional transportation options—or might if they had the opportunity. These include taxis and other paid ride-hailing services, informal ridesharing and carpooling, volunteer driver programs, and medical transportation services.
- **Infrastructure barriers:** Some community members face infrastructure challenges that create transportation barriers or hinder travel. Participants cited poor pavement conditions, lack of access from some neighborhoods to major thoroughfares, and temporary challenges stemming from maintenance, repair, and construction projects by MnDOT, cities, and counties.



Public engagement limitations

Most participants offered positive feedback on public engagement efforts by MnDOT and other government entities, but almost all also cited barriers. Participants said some members from the key communities feel unwelcome and unheard at public discussions of transportation issues. Other community members simply do not have time to engage on transportation issues because they are wrestling with challenges more central to their well-being and survival.

Participants offered suggestions for how MnDOT can better engage on transportation with key communities, including:

- Meet people where they are and attend the meetings and events of community groups, instead of holding separate public meetings.
- Engage community members who are interested in projects or issues as champions who can help MnDOT.
- Address transportation, childcare, and other needs for community members who want to participate in public discussions and decisions.
- Make sure people feel validated and acknowledged.
- Serve refreshments to make participants feel appreciated and welcomed.



Equity impacts

Participants offered a variety of perspectives on equity, most commonly framing equity in terms of lowering barriers for people and matching resources to their different levels of need. Many participants discussed how transportation advances equity for members of the key communities—and how a lack of transportation limits equity. Most cited transportation equity as important for access to jobs. Participants also mentioned equitable

access to health care, grocery stores, affordable retail establishments, educational opportunities, affordable health care, childcare, and other supportive social services.

Participants offered the following ideas for improving transportation equity:

- Designated lanes and traffic-signal priority for buses as a way to speed up public transit
- Discounted or free bus passes for riders with low incomes, teens, and disabled veterans
- A nonprofit taxicab service that might be able to offer free trips to qualifying riders
- Grocery delivery services for those who cannot easily travel to stores
- Telemedicine services to reduce the need for those with limited transportation options to travel
- Continued good work by MnDOT to secure grants and plan projects that meet community needs

Recommendations

District 1 leaders, District 1 staff, and staff from MnDOT's Central Office reviewed these themes and findings from the community conversations and developed potential strategies to address challenges and advance equity. Their review of themes and findings resulted in the following recommendations for how MnDOT can advance transportation equity:

- 1. MnDOT should continue to work with local partners to improve safety and accessibility for people who walk and bicycle to their destinations.**
- 2. District 1 should continue and expand its in-person and virtual public engagement efforts to involve members of key, underserved communities and to learn about transportation issues and opportunities beyond those tied to planned MnDOT projects.**
- 3. MnDOT should work with transit providers and local officials to make transit travel safer and to increase the involvement of key, underserved communities in transit policy and decisions.**
- 4. MnDOT and District 1 should explore ways to improve transit service in rural areas, in collaboration with Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs).**
- 5. District 1 and MnDOT should enhance efforts to address infrastructure challenges that create transportation barriers, including disruption on routes during maintenance and construction.**

These recommendations are discussed in more detail beginning on page 38 of this report. That section of the report includes specific strategies the MnDOT team developed to advance each of these five recommendations.

Origins of the equity effort

In January 2017, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) released its updated, 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP).¹ During the process of updating the plan, MnDOT sought input from stakeholders and the public about what to include in the plan. Participants in those conversations said MnDOT needs to advance equity, citing a range of disparities related to race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, and physical abilities. In response, MnDOT listed two activities to advance equity in its SMTP 2017-2020 Work Plan:

- Study how transportation affects equity, and identify transportation strategies and approaches that will meaningfully reduce disparities
- Pilot tools and strategies to better incorporate equity into project-level decision-making

To help advance equity in work planning, MnDOT chose to conduct community conversations designed to provide a qualitative, experienced-based perspective of how transportation affects equity. These community conversations about transportation gather information about equity concerns from a variety of groups and organizations, build relationships for MnDOT, and provide a pathway for continued engagement and initiatives to address equity issues.

MnDOT contracted with Management Analysis and Development (MAD)² for assistance with these community conversations, specifically to:

- Build MnDOT's capacity to conduct interviews
- Coordinate in-person interviews with organizations that work with and represent key communities in MnDOT's District 1
- Analyze the data gathered from conversations
- Report interview findings and recommendations
- Support the central office (CO) and District 1 in identifying solutions to address transportation inequities

Methodology

The project primarily consisted of in-depth interviews with groups, state and local government agencies, organizations, and community leaders—all generally referred to collectively in this report as “organizations”—that work with and represent key communities of interest for the District 1 community conversations about transportation equity.

The main purposes of the interviews were to:

- Better understand the organizations' perspectives about how the transportation system, services, and decision-making processes help or hinder the lives of people in Northeast Minnesota.

¹ Minnesota Department of Transportation. “Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan.” January 2017. <http://www.minnesotago.org/final-plans/smtf-final-plan>.

² MAD is the State of Minnesota's in-house consulting group. For more information, visit <http://www.mn.gov/mmb/mad>.

- Build relationships with organizations whose work aligns, directly or indirectly, with equity and transportation.
- Identify actions to address transportation inequities.

Selection method for key communities

MnDOT conducted an analysis of the eight counties in District 1, examining the current demographics and trends in the district and focusing on populations with known inequities.³ MnDOT used the analysis to further identify and prioritize which key communities to include in the transportation equity conversations.⁴ Communities include those:

- Currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes
- Experiencing known inequities in transportation access or outcomes
- With unique transportation needs not well served by current approaches

MnDOT District 1, Central Office (CO) staff, and other partners identified potential organizations for interviewees. The organizations MnDOT selected all work with and represent the project's key communities. MnDOT identified additional organizations by asking interviewees for suggestions on others to interview.

MAD contacted the organizations by phone and email, asked them to participate in the project, and scheduled interviews. MnDOT conducted interviews from November 2019 through February 2020.

Interview teams

All MnDOT interview teams included at least two people. The teams visited the organizations in person and asked questions using the semi-structured interview guide described in the section below on data collection and analysis.⁵ Most interviews were attended by interviewers from MnDOT District 1, and some teams included a combination MnDOT District 1, Central Office staff who work on statewide planning and public engagement, and consultants from MAD. The last interview was held in early March before the serious onset of COVID-19 in Minnesota.

In October 2019, MAD conducted an interview training session for participating MnDOT staff. Most of the interviewers participated in the training session, but several took the training later via Skype. The training goals included:

- Explaining the purpose and process for the interviews
- Providing qualitative research instructions, including note-taking guidelines
- Distributing project and interview materials
- Practicing interviewing

³ Refer to Appendix C: District 1 demographic analysis on page 45.

⁴ Refer to Appendix D: Key communities for conversations on page 52.

⁵ Refer to Appendix B: Project team and interviewers on page 44.

- Explaining the interview scheduling process

Data collection and analysis

MnDOT and MAD developed a semi-structured interview guide, meaning that interviewers followed the guide but could pursue other relevant topics as they arose.⁶

Interview topics included:

- Experiences in traveling for day-to-day activities, such as work, school, medical appointments, social and recreational activities, shopping for goods and services, and accessing human services
- Transportation barriers community members experience and opportunities to meet their needs
- Safety concerns for the communities
- Opportunities and challenges for the communities when engaging with government
- The perspectives of the organizations on both equity and how transportation can advance equity

MAD collected interview notes and conducted preliminary analysis to identify potential themes for District 1. When categorizing the notes, MAD used a first stage of coding to test the themes from its preliminary analysis and then added new codes as additional themes arose organically from the full set of interview notes.⁷ MAD confirmed the accuracy of both preliminary and organic themes by monitoring the number of comments that fit with the themes and the number of conversations where interviewees made such comments. MAD then reviewed and recoded the data as necessary to ensure consistency in coding for the main themes and additional subcodes. MAD used these themes and their subcodes to develop findings.

Implementation meetings

MnDOT Central Office staff, District 1 managers, and members of the interview teams met in June 2020 to hear about findings from the interviews and consider possible transportation equity improvements and actions. Specifically, participants in these implementation meetings did the following:

- Reviewed findings from the D1 community conversations
- Determined what level of influence MnDOT has over the issues behind those different findings
- Rated the findings based on MnDOT's level of influence
- Brainstormed about what District 1 and Central Office might do going forward with regard to the findings that MnDOT can influence

⁶ Refer to Appendix E: Transportation equity interview guide on page 55. For interviews with representatives of American Indian tribes, MnDOT used an interview guide adjusted to reflect the formal and important role of tribal governments in federal transit and highway programs for their areas.

⁷ MAD analysts coded data according to theme. If data could not reasonably fit a theme, that data was coded as Miscellaneous for review later or analysts created a new code to fit the new theme.

At the end of the first implementation meeting, participants voted on which of their brainstormed solutions they thought MnDOT should prioritize. Their high-priority solutions informed the recommendations found in this report.⁸

Participants met again in July 2020 to validate recommendations from this report, align them with ongoing MnDOT plans and initiatives, and further assess the opportunity for realistic action. In August 2020, the group reconvened to develop specific action items around the recommendations, identifying who at MnDOT should take what steps and when to advance the recommendations.

Organizations interviewed

Response rate

MnDOT invited 45 organizations to participate in a conversation and 34 agreed, for a response rate of 76 percent. Of the 10 organizations that were not interviewed, one declined the invitation and the other nine either did not respond to initial interview requests or were unable to find dates that worked for an interview within the project’s time frame.

Types of organizations

Table 1 lists the types of organizations interviewed. Most organizations interviewed are nonprofit organizations. As noted below, one interview was with local leaders—of the African American community in Duluth—who participated as individuals rather than as representatives of any organization.

Table 1. Types of organizations interviewed

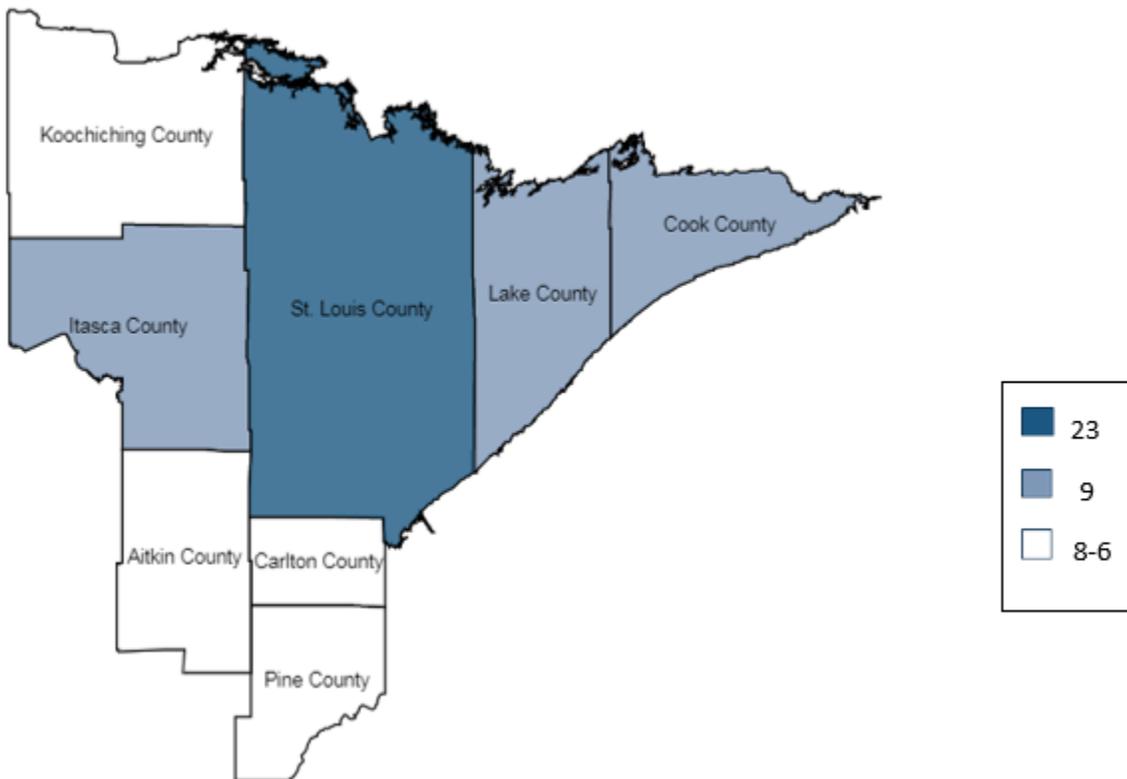
Organization type	Number interviewed
Nonprofit	21
Local government	3
Transit agency	3
Public school or public school-affiliated	2
Tribal government	2
Higher Education	1
Local leaders (unaffiliated)	1
State government	1
Total	34

⁸Refer to the recommendations section on page 38. For the full list of ideas suggested by participants from MnDOT’s District 1 and its Central Office, see Appendix F: Initial findings and potential solutions from Implementation Planning Meeting 1 on page 56.

Counties represented

Figure 1 counts how many of the 34 organizations interviewed have a presence in each of the 12 counties in District 1. Most organizations interviewed work with or represent key communities in several counties, so the counts by county in Figure 1 exceed the total of 34 for organizations interviewed. The counties served by the most organizations are St. Louis (23), Cook (9), and Lake (9).

Figure 1. Number of organizations interviewed based on the District 1 counties where they are active



Key communities represented

Figure 2 illustrates the key communities and the number of the organizations that include members of those communities among the people they work with and represent. Key communities are groups that are:

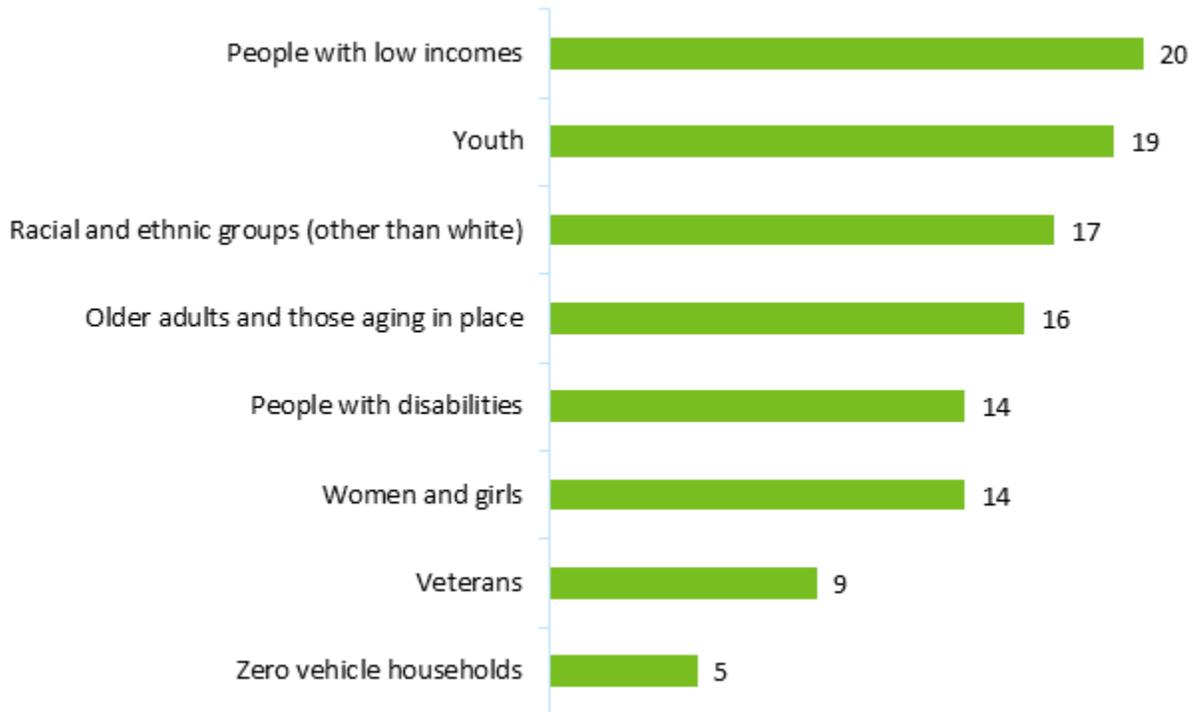
- Currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes
- Experiencing known inequities in transportation access or outcomes
- Facing unique transportation needs not well served by current approaches

Key communities are not mutually exclusive. A person can belong to one or many of the key communities identified.

All of the key communities identified at the start of the District 1 transportation equity initiative are among the groups served by more than one of the organizations interviewed. Many of the organizations work with

members of more than one of the key communities, so the number of organizations in Figure 2 exceeds the number of organizations interviewed.

Figure 2. Number of organizations interviewed based on the key communities they serve



Note: Counts by key communities exceed the total of 34 organizations interviewed because many of the organizations serve members of more than one of the communities.

Findings

This section describes the findings from the District 1 conversations about transportation equity for underrepresented communities and communities with unmet needs. Information is organized into four categories:

- **People perspective** highlights how transportation affects and is affected by many factors, including housing, employment, income, race and ethnicity, age, and abilities.
- **Modal perspective** focuses on how the different transportation modes and access to them create or limit opportunities.
- **Public engagement** looks at how government can best engage with Minnesotans, particularly members of the key communities this report considers.
- **Equity** provides perspectives on how transportation advances or limits equity, what suggestions conversation participants had for improving transportation equity, and how they defined equity.

Because many topics from the community conversations are interrelated, they may appear in more than one area of this findings section.

How to interpret the findings

For these equity conversations, MnDOT staff often met a representative from one organization, but some discussions included several representatives from one organization but serving different roles, and one conversation included representatives from three different organizations. In order to be clear and accurate in this report, the writers used the following terms:

- **Participant** refers to an individual.
- **Organization** refers to a specific organization.
- **Conversation** is a general term used to describe the interviews.

In addition to proportions such as one-third or three-fourths, this report uses the terms below to convey a sense for the number of conversations in which participants commented on topic:

- **A few** is generally two to four.
- **Several** is generally more than a few, but less than one-third.
- **Most** is more than half.
- **Nearly all** is greater than 90 percent.

People and communities

The boundaries for District 1 cover the northeast section of the state, stretching from the north central spot near Littlefork and Big Falls south and eastward to the Wisconsin border of the state's central region, near Rock Creek. The district includes all or parts of eight counties: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Pine, and St. Louis. The district accounts for almost 25 percent of Minnesota's land area but about 6 percent of its population. More than half (56 percent) of the district's population lives in St. Louis County, and another 13 percent lives in Itasca County. The City of Duluth (population 87,050) is more than five times the size of Hibbing (16,240), which is the next largest city in the district. Both cities are in St. Louis County. Seven other cities have populations of about 5,000 or more.⁹

The District 1 transportation equity project focused on traditionally underserved or under-represented communities, including people with low incomes, older adults, youth, people with disabilities, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Participants in the district's equity conversations talked about transportation issues and other challenges facing the communities they work with and represent.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, the data presented throughout this section is drawn from the Census Bureau's five-year estimates for 2017, which were used for MAD's demographic analysis of the District 1 in October 2019. For more information on key demographic factors in the district, refer to Appendix C: District 1 demographic analysis on page 45.

Beyond transportation, participants identified a wide range of challenges for many community members. Participants discussed low-paying jobs, seasonal work, unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, a lack of affordable housing, homelessness, chemical dependency, abuse by spouses and partners, and health problems, including mental health issues and access to health care. Many of these broader challenges significantly affect transportation options and access to locations, services, activities, and employment.

Transportation challenges limit access to locations, activities

“There aren’t enough options for affordable transportation and access for our members to conduct daily activities.”¹⁰

Participants reported that transportation challenges make it difficult for members of their communities to reach a variety of important locations and activities. Several highlighted a lack of transportation as a barrier to jobs, especially shift work with hours that extend outside the traditional nine-to-five range. Transportation limitations can make it difficult for community members to get to health care services and to shop at grocery stores, drug stores, big-box stores, and malls, according to several conversation participants. Participants cited other locations and activities as well, including after-school activities and school events, other community gatherings, social and cultural activities, government meetings for the public, social service agencies, support groups, and food shelves.

Some organizations help with transportation

Many of the organizations included in the conversations provide transportation services to members of the communities they work with. In some cases, the transportation services are organized and regularly offered as part of the organizations’ services and programs. For example, several organizations provide bus passes, a few operate volunteer driver programs¹¹, a few offer vouchers for taxi rides, and a few own vans they use to transport community members. One organization helps people secure driver’s permits, and another arranges for community members to receive donated cars, when they are available. Other organizations reported they take transportation into consideration when working with community members and will identify transportation resources or coordinate with transportation service providers to help people meet their needs. A few of the organizations offer limited and informal assistance, such as asking staff to provide rides occasionally when circumstances warrant it.

¹⁰ The findings section of this report uses quotes from interview notes, presented in italics. When possible, these quotations are verbatim from the notes the interviewers recorded, and in general they aren’t verbatim quotes from the interviewees. MAD edited the quotes for spelling, grammar, and clarity when necessary.

¹¹ Volunteer driver programs are a lower-cost transportation service provided by local governments, human service providers, transit providers, and community organizations, typically for non-emergency medical appointments and other purposes such as running errands. Volunteer driver programs are more common in smaller Greater Minnesota cities where dedicated transit services may not exist. However, some programs are available in more urban settings. For more about volunteer driver programs, see “Volunteer Drivers’ Program in Minnesota: Benefits and Barriers,” Frank Douma, 2017, <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/189303>.

“The transportation needs addressed by our organization are somewhat limited, such as providing a small amount of funding for gas from grants, assisting people with identifying and resolving barriers, or working with transportation services and vendors to promote or expand service. Case managers have the ability to personally transport individuals occasionally.”

Transportation challenges for demographic groups

People with low incomes

About 14 percent of the people in District 1 live below the federal poverty level, which is higher than the statewide level of about 10 percent. The poverty rate in the City of Duluth is about 20 percent. Among the District 1 counties, Koochiching County has the largest share of people in poverty (17 percent), and Lake County has the smallest (9 percent). The median household income for the eight district counties lags that of the state, at about \$51,300 compared to \$65,700. Aitkin County has the lowest median income (\$45,860). In the City of Duluth, the median household income is \$47,230.

Most participants in the District 1 conversations talked about low income and poverty as challenges for their communities. In terms of transportation impacts, participants in about one-third of the conversations noted some people with low incomes cannot afford reliable cars or the expenses that come with car ownership, including costs for insurance, gas, maintenance, and vehicle registration.¹² People with low incomes who own unreliable vehicles face potential mechanical problems, a few said. “A lot of people don’t have a car, or have a car that is in bad shape and may not operate very far out of town,” reported one participant. Several participants noted people with low incomes also face cost barriers to taxi and Lyft rides and public transit.

“Lack of funds is a barrier. People can’t afford car repairs, gas, and insurance costs. If they get tickets, they can’t pay. If they don’t have cars and live in rural areas, they can’t drive to town to use transit.”

Rural residents

With 6 percent of Minnesota’s population spread across 25 percent of the state’s land area, District 1 overall has a low population density and includes many rural areas. The Minnesota State Demographic Center classifies two of District 1’s eight counties as entirely rural (Aitken and Cook) and three others as a mix of small towns and rural areas.¹³ Participants in most of the conversations mentioned rural characteristics and challenges that affect members of their communities and transportation.

“Sometimes it’s a little more difficult in rural areas.”

¹² In its report on “The Economic Status of Minnesotans 2018,” The Minnesota State Demographic Center estimates 7 percent of households in Minnesota are without a vehicle. The percentage varies by race and ethnicity, with an estimated 31 percent of African American households lacking a vehicle, compared with 6 percent for white households. For more, refer to <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2019/mandated/190043.pdf>, p. 28.

¹³ Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2017. “Greater Minnesota: Refined and Revisited,” p. 33. https://mn.gov/admin/assets/greater-mn-refined-and-revisited-msdc-jan2017_tcm36-273216.pdf.

Participants in about one-third of the conversations noted that the long distances between destinations in rural areas make travel difficult, both for trips by car and via regional transit. Community members living in small towns and rural stretches have a hard time traveling to the district's larger population centers, including Grand Rapids, Hibbing, Virginia, and the Duluth area, a few participants reported. Rural areas often lack retail establishments and services, a few said, including grocery stores, hospitals, and nursing care facilities. And the low population density across large areas of District 1 limit transportation options for those who do not own cars or cannot drive, a few reported. Notably, regional transit service is limited in terms of places served, frequency of service, and hours of operation. "In rural areas, access is very difficult for busing and public transit," one participant observed. A few of the participants also noted recent cuts in some counties to the Rural Rides program for people who need transportation to jobs and jobs training in the short-term via buses, carpools, volunteer driver services, and taxis. One person expressed hope the job-related element of the Rural Rides program might expand again in the near future.

Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and Immigrants

"Race and ethnicity come into play on transportation equity in all kinds of ways. People of color are more likely to be living in poverty, and that impacts transportation access."

About 8 percent of District 1 residents identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, compared to about 14 percent of the population statewide. Using the categories from the Census, American Indian or Alaska Native is the largest group (3 percent of residents), followed by Black or African American (1 percent). The lands of five Minnesota Chippewa bands are within the geographic area for District 1's Area Transportation Partnership, in whole or in part: Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, and Mille Lacs.¹⁴ Among the eight District 1 counties, the share of residents who identify as American Indian is higher than the statewide share (1 percent) in all but Lake County. In Cook County, 8 percent of the residents are American Indian.

For the City of Duluth, about 10 percent of the people identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, with Black or African American accounting for the largest share (3 percent). Almost 3 percent of the people in District 1 identify as being two or more of the Census Bureau's racial groups. Less than 2 percent of all District 1 residents are Hispanic or Latino,¹⁵ with the largest proportion in Carlton County, at 3 percent. Statewide, persons with Hispanic or Latino ethnicity account for more than 5 percent of the population.

MnDOT staff asked participants in the District 1 equity conversations if race and ethnicity come into play regarding transportation equity.¹⁶ Participants in about three-quarters of the conversations commented on race and ethnicity in this context. Half tied race and ethnicity to transportation equity issues, while most of the rest

¹⁴ The lands of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe fall mostly within the boundaries of MnDOT District 3 but partly within District 1. All the lands of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe are within the District 3 boundaries, but segments of the Mille Lac lands are within the broader geographic boundaries for District 1's Area Transportation Partnership.

¹⁵ These estimates come from the Census Bureau, which uses "Hispanic or Latino" rather than the alternative "Latinx."

¹⁶ The equity conversations in Districts 2, 8, 4, and 6 did not include this explicit question about race, ethnicity, and transportation equity, so these findings from District 1 cannot be compared with findings from those earlier district reports on transportation equity.

reported race and ethnicity aren't linked directly to transportation equity concerns. A few said the population of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in their service areas is too small for them to know if race and ethnicity come into play.

The participants who tied race and ethnicity to transportation cited a range of concerns. A few mentioned a general lack of racial and ethnic diversity at transportation meetings and among transportation decision-makers. A few others complained of racism, including bus drivers treating riders of color poorly and differently than white riders and the possibility of racism in a reported lack of attention to safety at an intersection where accidents have affected American Indians. Participants in a few conversations linked race and ethnicity with lower income levels resulting from long-standing racial equity issues and noted people with low incomes are more likely to experience transportation challenges and inequities.

People with disabilities

About 15 percent of people in District 1 have a disability, compared to 11 percent statewide. Among district residents age 65 and older, 33 percent have a disability, compared with 31 percent statewide. The largest shares of people with a disability are in Aitkin County (18 percent) and Pine County (17 percent).

Participants in more than one-third of the conversations mentioned issues for people with disabilities. They cited poor access to sidewalks due to uncleared snow and a lack of curb cuts and difficulties with transit travel because some people with disabilities have a hard time getting from their doorsteps to the curb or bus stop for pickup. Some providers of transportation services are unwilling or unable to assist people who use wheelchairs. People with disabilities may not be able to bicycle or walk to destinations.

Veterans

Most comments from participants about transportation challenges for veterans focused on veterans with disabilities who cannot drive and need travel to jobs or health services. Veterans make up about 10 percent of the district's civilian population age 18 and older, and 30 percent of those veterans have a disability, the same as the statewide share. A few cited free transit rides for veterans with service-related disabilities and van services from the Disabled American Veterans organization.

A few participants mentioned problems for some veterans who lose their driver's licenses when they fall behind or fail to pay their required child support commitments. One participant who works with veterans praised county veterans service officers for support and coordination in addressing transportation and other challenges.

Older adults and youth

People age 65 and older account for almost 20 percent of the District 1 population, compared to 15 percent statewide. Among the counties in the district, Aitkin has the highest share of older people (31 percent). Youth under the age of 18 account for another 20 percent of the district's population, compared with 23 percent for Minnesota overall. Carlton County has the highest proportion of youth, at 23 percent.

Several of the conversations touched on transportation challenges for older adults. A few noted people generally lose their ability to drive as they age. "Older folks who lack transportation options often face isolation," reported one participant. A few said transit service is important for many older adults but can also be

difficult for some to use. One said bus drivers on curb-to-curb trips often help older riders carry groceries right to their homes. Other conversation participants mentioned many older adults depend on informal ride arrangements with friends and family.

Participants in several of the conversation talked about transportation challenges for youth. A few reported youth with limited transportation options miss programs, events, and social occasions, including activities in school districts where after-school bus service isn't available. One participant mentioned public transit as a critical mode for youth, while another said many teenagers have a negative view of bus transportation and therefore use transit less than they should. One said transportation challenges sometimes lead to missed school days for children of families with low incomes and in this way negatively affect academic success. Another noted that Lyft and Uber offer services to adults but not youth, eliminating these options for young people.

“Transportation is definitely a barrier for the youth population we serve.”

Women and girls

Participants in several conversations noted problems for women and girls when it comes to transportation and travel. A few reported women and girls are less likely to walk or bicycle to destinations because they are afraid for their safety, a problem called out for indigenous women in particular. Some women may be trapped in abusive relationships and unable to seek relief and shelter because they lack access to a car or other modes of transportation, a few participants noted. For some pregnant women in District 1, travel to hospitals and clinics for obstetric services—ranging from checkups to delivery—is a challenge because many rural hospitals have closed labor and delivery facilities, noted one participant.

“Victims of domestic violence tend to become isolated because they are too far away from services if they are in rural areas. Transportation issues cause some of this.”

Transportation and well-being

During these equity conversations, participants discussed several factors that influence the well-being of people in the district—factors that are beyond transportation but are affected by it. People with limited transportation options face greater challenges when it comes to housing, employment, health care, and services that can help them meet other basic needs, they said.

Employment

Jobs and employment opportunities greatly affect economic stability and quality of life. Participants in about one-third of the conversation talked about employment issues for their communities, with many linking the challenges to transportation considerations. Most of those participants noted community members with limited transportation options lack access to jobs. A few reported transportation is especially challenging for workers in low-paying jobs with early-morning, late-night, or overnight hours when little or no public transit is available. Consequently, transit is a practical option for reaching many destinations, said one participant, but often proves difficult for commuting to work.

For many people, car ownership is vital to their employability, a few participants said. Personal vehicles are important not only for trips to work but also for getting to childcare so that people with kids can work. A few said some community members can only get to jobs in their immediate area because they walk, bicycle, or take public transit to work. A few participants complained about a lack of good jobs with benefits in the region, with one noting a decline in employment over time in the region’s mining and timber industries.

“Transportation is vital to the well-being of the community. Transportation affords people access to securing long-term work... Without reliable transportation, having both employment and childcare is difficult.”

Health care and social services

More than one-third of the participants commented on transportation challenges regarding access to health care and other human services for members of the communities they work with and represent. With regard to health care, participants mentioned a number of challenges, including infrequent transit service to facilities in Duluth from communities along the North Shore, long trips for dental care, volunteer drivers uncomfortable with transporting sick passengers, and problems for people wanting to visit family members at faraway hospitals. One health care provider commented that while a small percentage of all her organization’s clients face transportation issues, resolving those issues is very important to the health of that group. A few commented on a general lack of health care providers in parts of the district. Beyond health care, several participants discussed transportation challenges for people in need of other human services, including food shelves, counseling, and assistance from social workers.

“They call the ambulance to get to the hospital, but how do they get back?”

Housing

Several conversations included mention of housing needs and costs for community members. According to estimates from the Housing and Transportation (H+T) Affordability Index, residents in all eight of the District 1 counties spend at least half of their household incomes on housing and transportation combined, with Aitkin residents estimated to be spending the largest proportion (64 percent of income) and St. Louis County residents spending the smallest (52 percent).¹⁷ Additionally, according to estimates from the Minnesota Housing Partnership, three of the district’s counties were in the top 20 counties statewide for percentage point spread between change in rent and change in renter income from 2000 and 2017, meaning rental costs increased while renter income decreased: St. Louis ranked third (a 53 percentage point gap), Koochiching ranked ninth (36 percentage point gap), and Pine ranked seventeenth (31 percentage point gap).¹⁸

Participants in several conversations highlighted a lack of affordable housing in many places and long waiting lists for the limited housing where people can use government vouchers to pay for part of their rent. Rents and

¹⁷ The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT). “H+T Index.” <https://htaindex.cnt.org/>. The index divides estimated costs by representative incomes. CNT estimates Minnesotans statewide spend 60 percent of household incomes on housing and transportation combined, compared to 68 percent nationwide.

¹⁸ Minnesota Housing Partnership. “State of the State’s Housing 2019,” pp. 65-67.

http://www.mhponline.org/images/stories/images/research/SOTS-2019/2019FullSOTSPrint_Final.pdf.

housing prices tend to be higher in cities, where people have easier access to jobs and services, so some people find more affordable housing in rural and remote locations. This, a few participants noted, leaves people with low incomes and limited transportation options with reduced access to the employment, health care, and social services that could improve their circumstances.

“A lot of people are at the poverty level, and to find affordable housing, they have to live outside an urban area, but then they don’t have transportation to get to a job. Sometimes transportation is a bigger barrier than employment.”

Infrastructure barriers for community members

MnDOT staff asked conversation participants if community members face infrastructure challenges that create transportation barriers or hinder travel.¹⁹ Comments from participants in about two-thirds of the conversation related to this topic.²⁰ About half the participants cited road conditions that make travel difficult, with most citing poor pavement. A few talked specifically about rough county and local roads, and a few noted problems along Highway 169 in the stretch from Ely through Virginia to Hibbing. A few said high travel speeds and traffic volumes create unsafe conditions for community members along some routes.

A few talked about access barriers in Duluth neighborhoods stemming from major thoroughfares, specifically Mesaba Avenue (Highway 194), Highway 23, and Interstate 35, including the “Can of Worms” interchange. A few others reported a lack of routes in the Duluth area creates barriers for members of their communities, including the lack of exit and entrance points on Interstate 35 from N. Lake Ave. to N. 21st Ave. E. Several participants said rough and damaged sidewalks create barriers—especially for people with disabilities.

“Previous MnDOT projects have divided the Lincoln Park community, with lasting hard feelings as a result.”

When discussing infrastructure barriers, several mentioned maintenance, repair, and construction of roadways cause problems for members of their communities, albeit temporary ones. A few complained of long waits from reduced traffic lanes or of detours that add significant distance and time to trips. Most who raised this issue mentioned challenges in Duluth from major construction projects currently underway.

Transportation and infrastructure

The District 1 community conversations covered modes of transportation for members of communities currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making, experiencing known inequalities in transportation access

¹⁹ The equity conversations in Districts 2, 8, 4, and 6 did not include this question about infrastructure challenges, so these findings from District 1 cannot be compared with findings from those earlier district reports on transportation equity.

²⁰ Participants in the transportation equity conversations at times offered suggestions and made requests for location specific MnDOT actions to improve routes, modes, and transportation in the district. MnDOT staff captured these comments, MAD compiled them, and District 1 staff are reviewing them for possible action. A number of these potential action items concern local infrastructure, issues, and roads and consequently are of interest to city and county governments, rather than MnDOT.

or outcomes, and facing unique transportation needs not well served by current approaches. Participants talked about the importance of different transportation options, access to them, and barriers to their use.

Most used and most preferred means of transportation

During the District 1 equity conversations, participants were asked about both the most common and the preferred modes of transportation used by members of the communities they work with and represent. In almost half of the conversations, participants noted that personal vehicles, including rides in vehicles owned by family and friends, and transit are the most commonly used modes of transportation for the communities in the district. Similarly, in nearly half of the conversations, participants also highlighted that many community members walk in order to access basic needs and services, especially during the warmer months. In most of these conversations, organizations noted that community members often lack access to reliable personal vehicles, which increases their reliance on transit, walking, and biking. Other less frequently mentioned transportation modes used by community members include biking, taxis, volunteer driver programs, shuttle services, and in one instance, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs).

Participants also identified the most preferred transportation modes, from among the most used. In over half of the conversations, participants reported that personal vehicles are preferred or most critical for their communities. This includes personal vehicles that community members drive themselves as well as ones owned by friends and family who give them rides. Participants in several of these conversations reported that personal vehicles are important because community members often need to travel long distances to access health and human services, such as medical appointments and assistance for veterans in need.

“Privately owned vehicles are the most critical. They provide people with the ability to meet work shift needs. Public transit is not flexible enough. If we lived in the Metro, transit could get us anywhere we want. But not here. You need a car to get to work and to get kids to school.”

Similarly, participants in nearly half of the conversations noted that public transit is also critical for community members, including people with low incomes, college students, older adults, and people leaving situations of domestic violence. Several participants noted that these community members often do not own personal vehicles, or do not have access to reliable vehicles, making transit a critical mode. Participants in few other conversations noted that community members often lacked insurance or driver’s licenses.

Walking and biking are critical methods of transportation for community members who lack access to personal vehicles and cannot afford or cannot access transit service. Even for those who use public transit, walking is important. For American Indian communities, safe and reliable pedestrian network is especially critical due to the rural nature of the reservations and reliance on walking for day-to-day needs.²¹

“All transit riders are pedestrians at the beginning and end of each trip. Transit riders depend on a good pedestrian network.”

²¹ According to a study carried out by the University of Minnesota, many people move around on foot in reservation communities, making pedestrian safety a high-priority concern for tribal communities. For more on the findings of the study, refer to: <https://www.hhh.umn.edu/news/researchers-tribes-collaborate-advance-roadway-safety-minnesota-reservations>.

Less frequently, participants also cited volunteer driver programs, taxi services where available, and shuttle services as preferred or critical transportation modes for some communities. Volunteer driver programs and shuttle services are important for older adults and people with disabilities to access basic needs and services, such as medical appointments. A few participants noted taxis, where available, are necessary for families with low incomes because they often lack access to reliable personal vehicles.

Personal vehicles

Most interview participants noted personal vehicles are the most-used mode of transportation for the communities they work with and represent. Several participants said personal vehicles are particularly important in because of District 1's low population density, long distances between many cities and towns, and limited public transportation in rural areas. Access to a personal vehicle makes it easier to get to and from work, medical appointments, after-school activities, and retail stores. Community members with access to personal vehicles can get groceries without having to wait for transit or figure out how to travel long distances with bags or packages.

A few respondents talked about the difficulty of getting to work—especially shift work with non-traditional start and end times—without access to a personal vehicle. One interview participant asked, “How do people get to work if they don’t have a car?” According to estimates from the US Census Bureau, 80 percent of employed Minnesotans with low incomes drive cars, trucks, or vans to work, or they carpool with others.²²

“For those with cars, most of the time everything is easily accessible anywhere.”

Barriers to vehicle ownership and driving

While personal vehicles may be the most critical mode of transportation for District 1 residents, most interview participants talked about barriers to vehicle ownership and driving for members of the communities they work with and represent. They discussed several obstacles, including ownership costs, safety, weather, and problems people have getting or keeping a driver's license.

Ownership costs

In a large majority of the conversations, participants said costs are a barrier to owning personal vehicles for their communities. The average 2018 purchase price nationwide for three-year-old used models was \$7,500 for subcompact cars and \$13,700 for all types of personal vehicles.²³ Several of the participants who cited costs as a barrier pointed specifically to vehicle reliability as an issue for their communities. People with unreliable vehicles may encounter problems getting to work on time and regularly and may have trouble traveling out of town to get to appointments. Community members in some places within District 1, including rural areas, may have difficulties not only paying for vehicle repairs but even reaching a repair shop if none are nearby.

²² Management Analysis and Development calculations using five-year U.S. Census journey-to-work data from the American Community Survey, 2017, for persons with incomes below 150% of the poverty level.

²³ Edmunds. “Used Vehicle Outlook 2019,” p. 2. <https://static.edmunds-media.com/unversioned/img/industry-center/insights/2019-used-vehicle-outlook-report-final.pdf>.

“Having a dependable vehicle is critical for living in Grand Marias, or anywhere for that matter. Without reliable transportation having both employment and childcare is difficult.”

Even when residents have vehicles to drive, the associated costs may keep them from doing so, several participants said. They cited costs for insurance, license tabs, and other fees. One participant said a few community members will come to their location for appointments but lack the money needed to pay their parking fees and get their vehicles out of the ramp. Others may not have funds to pay for gas on their return trips home.

Driver’s license issues

Comments from interview participants about driver’s license issues tended to fall into two categories—the inability to get a license in the first place and being unable to reinstate a license reinstated after it has been suspended. Several participants noted logistical difficulties community members have obtaining a license, including traveling to the site for the driver’s test and taking time off work to do so. “It’s a bad cycle of needing a license for getting to work but needing to take time off work to get license,” said one participant. Other participants reported the cost of driver’s education training for youth is too high for members of their communities, which means the young people simply do not get driver’s licenses.

Other participants talked about community members losing driver’s licenses because they fall behind on child support payments or amass fines from parking and traffic tickets. Some of these community members will continue to drive and may then rack up more fines, making it even more difficult for them to reinstate their licenses. A few participants also noted some people lack licenses because of physical disabilities, including ones related to age, or because of substance abuse issues.

Safety

Several interview participants pointed to safety issues as barriers to driving in the district. A few conversations touched on safety issues for older adults, who may have difficulties reading signs at night, for example. Older adults are driving longer than they should, a few participants said, because other options are severely limited.

“Seniors end up driving in this community longer than is a good idea. There are no other options for them. [Some] can’t walk. There’s no safe taxi service. There’s no transit. And they probably shouldn’t be driving either.”

A few interview participants noted safety issues specific to different cities and towns in the district, including dangerous intersections, challenging curves, inadequate lighting, unclear signage, and problems with people speeding and driving too fast for road conditions. Increased driver education could help, one participant said.

Winter weather

A few participants said winter weather creates a barrier when it comes to personal vehicles. Heavy snow, ice, and the poor driving conditions they create can keep people off the roads.

Public transit

Several government entities, nonprofit organizations, and private companies offer transit service throughout the eight counties in District 1. Many of the transit providers operate accessible vehicles that people with disabilities

can use. Some providers offer regularly scheduled intercity travel connecting communities within the district and between the district and other regions of the state. The Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) is District 1's largest transit operator, with about 70 buses providing regularly scheduled, fixed-route service.

For much of the district, transit is dial-a-ride service, as is common throughout Greater Minnesota and elsewhere in regions that lack dense concentrations of both riders and destinations. For dial-a-ride transit in District 1, users most often schedule pickups and drop-offs by phone either from their chosen locations to their desired destinations or to and from designated stops.

The following entities provide transit and bus transportation in District 1.²⁴

- **Arrowhead Transit:** Operates scheduled and dial-a-ride transit services Monday through Friday for communities in the counties of Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Pine and St. Louis, with some limited weekend services. Arrowhead Transit also operates limited but regularly scheduled service between some cities and Duluth.
- **Big Woods Transit:** Provides fixed-route commuter service along routes from Nett Lake to Orr and from Nett Lake to Cook, as well as dial-a-ride service in the corridors from Nett Lake to Virginia. Riders can be picked up and dropped off at several key tribal locations.
- **Duluth Transit Authority:** Provides fixed route transit services in Duluth, Hermantown, Proctor, and Superior, WI, as well as curb-to-curb paratransit service in Duluth, Proctor, and Superior, WI, through its STRIDE program for people with disabilities. Both services are offered all days of the week. STRIDE is available to all individuals whose disability prevents them from boarding and riding on regular routes operated by DTA. DTA also operates three trolley buses that offer circulator service in downtown Duluth during tourist season.²⁵
- **Fond du Lac Transit:** Provides scheduled, deviated-fixed-route transit services all days of the week. Operated by the Fond du Lake Band, this transit service is available from stops at key tribal locations, the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, several Duluth locations, and the two Fond du Lac casinos. Fond du Lac Transit offers service to Duluth three times a week. Monthly passes for Fond du Lac Transit and Arrowhead Transit are honored between the two systems.
- **Hibbing Area Transit:** Provides limited fixed routes, with stops at popular stores and the library, and dial-a-ride services for all residents of Hibbing. The City of Hibbing operates this transit service.
- **Jefferson Lines:** Provides intercity bus services in Minnesota and in 13 other states, with multiple stops in District 1. A privately owned company, Jefferson lines receives federal funds through MnDOT to subsidize service on some intercity routes that stop at locations in the state.

“Public transit is great and is needed for our clients. Continue to promote public transportation and make access better in our areas for Minnesota.”

Transit service limitations and barriers

Participants in all the community conversations discussed the importance of transit for their community members. Participants reported transit is critical for access to daily activities and basic needs among some older

²⁴ For more information about Transit in Minnesota, including District 1, refer to MnDOT's interactive web tool <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/riders/index.html>

²⁵ For more information about DTA, refer to <https://www.duluthtransit.com/home/getting-there/fares-and-passes/>.

adults, families with low incomes, and youth. While a few participants said existing transit generally meet the needs of the communities they work with and represent, most said the current level of transit falls short. A few noted public transit providers offer limited service for smaller communities and rural areas because low population density there makes transit expensive to operate. Participants in nearly all the conversations highlighted barriers to transit.

“People outside of the service areas for the DTA or Arrowhead Transit find it difficult to get to where they need to be, including work, medical and dental appointments, shopping, etc. For example, Duluth transit is better than [transit] on the Range or in North Shore areas.”

Limited hours of operation and areas of service

Participants in most of the conversations said limited hours of operation present a challenge for those who rely on transit in the district. All of the transit providers in the district operate Monday to Friday during normal working hours in most locations. In some cases, buses operate on limited schedules on the weekend, as is the case in Duluth and Hibbing. In Ely, Grand Marais, Two Harbors, any many other smaller cities, transit is only available on a limited schedule during the week.

Beyond hours of operation, participants in several conversations also highlighted limited service areas as a barrier. According to these participants, transit routes are limited in some parts of the district, making it difficult for riders to reach destinations such as job sites, grocery stores, shopping areas, healthcare services, schools, and banks. A few participants said transit routes in Duluth do not offer easy access to grocery stores and more affordable, big-box retail.

Rural routes: In nearly half of the conversations, participants discussed transit limitations for people living in the district’s smaller communities and rural areas. Several participants noted that while transit exists within the larger cities in the area, transit providers may offer only limited service between smaller communities, which makes it difficult for people to rely on transit to get to jobs, medical appointments, or college classes. For example, the regularly scheduled transit service between Two Harbors and Duluth operates once a week on different days. One participant noted Arrowhead Transit offers weekly service between Ely and Virginia if a minimum number of riders make reservations in advance for the trip, but that minimum requirement is a barrier for the small number of riders who use the service. “You must call a couple of days in advance for a [bus] reservation,” this participant said, “and then the reservation may be cancelled due to lack of ridership.”

“Within the [Duluth] city limits, transit is easy, but if you need to go outside city limits to the rural areas, or other small towns up the shore or inland, it’s difficult.”

A few participants cited a lack of coordination between transit providers. Some transit providers in the district coordinate transfers between their services, which helps riders on both intercity trips and travel within communities. However, participants suggested transit providers could increase their coordination, improve existing service, and reduce wait times and distances between stops. One participant noted better coordination between providers increases the combined area community members can reach using transit.

Employer location and shift times for workers: Several participants noted existing transit service doesn't meet the needs of community members who work second- and third-shift jobs or at facilities located outside of transit service areas. Several participants reported community members with low incomes often hold jobs that require work on shifts in the early morning and late at night. "In Duluth, from the Hillside neighborhood to Walmart by the mall, it's an hour bus ride and you need to change buses," said one participant. "The bus doesn't leave early enough for an early morning shift."

"I have a client going to a job in Warba, where there's no transportation available. I can't get him to employment if there is no transportation. Having a case manager drive 40 miles to take one person to a job isn't cost effective."

Travel times and transit scheduling

Community members can face long travel and wait times when using transit because of infrequent service to many stops and the need to transfer from one route to another. Participants described examples of community members spending traveling by transit for many hours to attend to basic needs, especially in cases where their destinations are in cities other than where they started their trips. Participants cited this challenge for travel to medical appointments, social service facilities, and retail establishments. Even in Duluth, people who use transit can face long rides, especially if the trip requires multiple transfers from one bus route to another. "The bus routes frequently do not run directly from the locations where people live to where they need to go," said one participant. "Many routes go through the downtown hub, which makes the trip much longer."

"There's nowhere locally to buy things like personal items. People need to take transit, and needing to shop on transit's schedule is difficult. Even if you're shopping for small things, you need to be away for... hours because shopping requires a trip to Duluth."

Schools: Participants in a few conversations highlighted limited bus service as a barrier for school-aged children, youth in general, and their families. Participants said a lack of direct transit service to schools, especially in the hours after school, means long travel times or no travel at all to school meetings and events for parents with low incomes and limited transportation options. A few participants noted the lack of transit service to some schools keeps students in their communities from participating in after school activities. A few called for more transit service to other destinations frequented by youth.

Winter weather barriers

"Winter snow and ice conditions on sidewalks and streets are a huge barrier. People can't get from their house to the street or to [transit] pickup locations. There is no place for buses to pull over for on and off loading."

Participants in nearly half of the conversations discussed winter weather challenges that make transit travel difficult in the district. Northeast Minnesota typically gets more snow annually than other parts of the state.²⁶

²⁶ Large parts of District 1 received an average of from 60 to 95 inches of snow for the years 1981 and 2010, compared with between 35 and 50 inches in the rest of the state, according to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, "Minnesota Normal Annual Snowfall: 1981-2010," https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/climate/summaries_and_publications/normals_snow_1981_2010.html.

On average, the Lake Superior area receives more than 70 inches of snow annually, with lake effect snow making the highlands area along the North Shore the state's snowiest.²⁷

Participants who talked about winter weather and transit most often highlighted poor snow removal, severe weather events, and a lack of bus shelters as barriers for transit riders during winter months. One participant noted "roads are narrow when the snow piles up, and that leads to traffic delays when [buses] have to block the entire street to load and unload." Another participant said delayed snow and ice removal in more rural areas makes it difficult for transit providers to pick up customers in a timely fashion. According participants in one conversation, weather conditions coupled with the hilly terrain in the Duluth area, can lead to transit service cancellations, leaving people unable to get to their jobs.

Accessibility

Physical accessibility: In several conversations, participants discussed accessibility challenges for people with disabilities who use transit. Older adults and people with disabilities often require assistance to get in and out of vehicles, and some need help securing wheelchairs and motorized scooters, participants said. While some transit providers offer door-to-door services, others have designated stops, which can be challenging for older adults and people with disabilities. One participant noted that when someone with a disability must pay for their own transit fare and also for the fare of their personal care attendant or a support person, the cost may be prohibitive and therefore a limit to mobility.

A few participants highlighted accessibility challenges for transit riders with mobility issues, including the lack of curb cuts on sidewalks, poor or delayed snow removal at and around bus stops, and parking lots poorly designed for pick-up and drop-off. A few cited the cold and snowy winter months in general as difficult times for people with disabilities to travel by transit. According to a transit provider, some buses have load capacity limits that prevent them from accommodating heavier wheelchair models, which creates challenges for some riders.

Language and user accessibility: In a few conversations, participants described challenges for community members who use transit and must navigate the transit systems. Dial-a-ride transit requires riders to call ahead and schedule pick-up and drop-offs, which can be complicated and difficult for some community members. One participant also noted community members who speaks languages other than English may face barriers when using transit.

Cost of ridership

Participants in almost a third of the conversations talked about the transit fees riders pay. They said transit services can be expensive for many community members, especially if they travel during peak-fare hours, or between District 1 cities, or with their children. For people with low incomes, even heavily subsidized transit fares may be cost prohibitive. The transit fare in Duluth is \$0.75 per ride during off-peak hours but rises to \$1.50 per ride during peak hours. For services operated by Arrowhead Transit, fares for transit within communities ranges from \$1.75 per ride in Virginia and Grand Rapids to \$1.25 per ride in Cloquet, Pine City, Grand Marais, and Two Harbors. Fare for transit rides between communities ranges from \$2.50 to \$8.00 per ride. A few

²⁷ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. "Climate frequently asked questions."
<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/climate/faqs.html>.

participants noted many transit providers offer free rides for young children and disabled veterans, and have reduced prices for monthly passes.

“The cost of transportation is always a concern for clients due to budget constraints.”

Safety

Participants in nearly one-third of the conversations raised safety concerns about transit use. These included the following:

- **Traffic safety:** A few participants said busy roads and intersections make it difficult and dangerous for community members to get to and from transit vehicles.
- **Transit shelters and related infrastructure:** A few participants cited safety concerns with transit infrastructure, including a lack of bus shelters, the location of certain bus stops, and poor lighting at bus shelters.
- **Safety on buses:** A few participants discussed perceived safety issues on buses for passengers and drivers. One participant expressed concerns about violence and aggressive behavior. Another noted those fleeing domestic violence may worry that if they take the bus, their abusive partner may be on the same bus.

Other barriers

In a few conversations, participants highlighted other barriers to transit use including:

- **Negative perceptions:** Participants said some people may be unlikely or unwilling to use transit because they have negative perceptions about buses or transit riders.
- **Bicycle racks:** Participants noted some buses lack bicycle racks.
- **Shopping bags:** Participants reported community members in Duluth have a difficult time using transit to grocery shop because DTA limits the number of shopping bags someone can bring on the bus to make sure the aisles stay clear. For a time, DTA operated a bus one a week with storage space for grocery bags from two low-income neighborhoods in Duluth to the closest full-service grocery store, but that service is no longer available.

Transit improvement suggestions

In nearly all conversations, participants offered improvement ideas for transit to better meet the needs of their community members. Notable suggestions included the following:

- Expand hours of service for transit operations—a common suggestion.
- Expand transit service areas and routes in general—another common suggestion.
- Increase direct routes and service to popular destinations.
- Increase express routes, including during off-peak hours to job sites where community members work.
- Improve pedestrian crossing signals and reduce traffic speed at busy intersections along bus routes.
- Use apps to improve on-demand transit services.
- Increase the number of park-and-ride locations to encourage transit use and carpooling.
- Allow the bus passes that school districts use for their students to extend beyond one month’s time.
- Eliminate peak-hour fares, or offer need-based, free-fare programs.
- Include warming shelters at designated bus stops and improve accessibility at bus shelters.
- Improve snow removal at bus stops and shelters.
- Improve communication from transit services during shutdowns and adverse weather events.

Walking

Nearly every interview touched on topics for pedestrians. Many interview participants said more walking is done for recreation than for travel to work. Several interview participants cited good trails and paths in their communities for recreational walking. Getting around on foot is easier in compact downtown areas compared with areas with a big box stores, for example. Participants also noted a lack of infrastructure in many communities can make walking difficult. A few participants mentioned improvements for pedestrians, especially the Safe Routes to School programs, which reduce traffic and increase safety for students and others around schools.

Barriers to Walking

Safety

Almost all interview participants talked about barriers to walking, and most cited safety as a significant concern. Several Interview participants cited high vehicle speeds and traffic volumes as safety barriers, as well as unsafe intersections and pedestrian crossings in different cities within District 1. Several respondents noted visibility problems at intersections—from weather-related snowbank height and sunlight glare to parked vehicles blocking sightlines. Other respondents expressed concern about inattentive drivers. One interview respondent said, “In the summer, I’m deathly afraid to walk because of the traffic.” A few cited concerns people have that they might be accosted when walking alone or at night.

“[C]rossing the highway is a barrier. It’s difficult and dangerous for kids crossing the road when traffic is traveling 55 to 65 miles per hour.”

Winter weather

As is true for other modes of transportation, several interview participants said weather is a barrier to walking in District 1 communities. Sidewalks are not cleared of snow and ice in a timely manner, or at all, according to several participants. Where local ordinances require people to clear their sidewalk, they tend not to be enforced, a few said. Snow and ice on the sidewalks often force pedestrians to walk in the streets, according to some interview participants. They also noted snow and ice cause difficulties for people pushing strollers on sidewalks and getting onto sidewalks from the bus. A few conversations brought up a lack of appropriate winter clothing as a problem for people walking in the cold temperatures, especially children.

Infrastructure problems

Infrastructure can be a barrier to walking in District 1 communities, according to several interview participants. Incomplete sidewalk systems and sidewalks in disrepair create barriers for pedestrians in some communities. Several interview participants pointed to a lack of crosswalks in general as a barrier, while others noted specific busy streets and highways lacking crosswalks. While a few participants reported less walking in rural areas, a few cited a need for pedestrian infrastructure in rural areas for those who do walk.

“Walking in rural areas is risky and infrastructure is needed to keep people off of the shoulders of busy roads.”

Physical limitations

Several participants noted age and mobility issues as barriers to walking. Both older adults and children may have trouble walking long distances and up steep hills, notably in Duluth. The time that traffic signals allow for pedestrians to cross roadways is too short for older adults and those with mobility issues, according to a few participants. Poor sidewalk condition is a barrier for anyone using a scooter or wheelchair.

Perceptions of walking

Some interview participants noted their localities promote walking and biking, especially on recreational paths and trails. However as one interview participant said, having a good recreational trail system doesn't necessarily translate well into a good system for residents walking to school or work. At least one city in the district—Grand Marais—has a pedestrian plan that will guide installation of new sidewalks and repair of older sidewalks in high-demand areas in years to come. One participant said about the perception of walking, "I remember one community member telling me, 'If you see me walking, it's not because I want to be walking. Pick me up.'"

Biking

Some District 1 communities have made investments in bicycle infrastructure, but overall, participants in most of the conversations noted a lack of infrastructure when it comes to biking. Most of the interview participants who talked about biking said people generally bicycle for recreation instead of for commuting to work, although some people bicycle to work, a few said. While participants in several conversations noted recreational trails in and around their communities, they also talked about a lack of bicycle lanes in cities and towns in the district, and a lack of connection between the trails.

Barriers to bicycling

Lack of infrastructure

Most interview participants talked about barriers to bicycling in their communities, with a lack of infrastructure cited as one of the more common barriers. Participants noted a lack dedicated bicycle lanes and poor lighting and signage in the few designated lanes or routes. One interview participant said the community bicycle route lacked a designated lane, so riders are forced to use the shoulder of the road. Several participants noted a lack of bicycle lanes and paths to get to and from recreational bicycle trails or missing segments on those trails. One participant said a bicycle trail through a state park is interrupted by a bridge without bicycle lanes, which creates a challenge. A few participants cited a lack of bicycle parking as a barrier.

"And to top it off, we don't have bike racks. People have to put their bikes in their office areas. If you have a cube, you don't want to be stepping over bikes. I don't know too many people who bike here, but some do. It's the diehards."

Nonetheless, several interview participants noted improvements in biking infrastructure in some communities, including more trails, bicycle lanes, and bicycle racks. Some interview participants reported good and safe bicycle trail systems in their communities, and some said communities are using increased bicycle parking and other infrastructure improvements to promote biking.

Safety

Several interview participants mentioned safety is another barrier to bicycling, particularly where bicycle riders mix with motor vehicle traffic. High vehicle speeds are a concern. Traffic volume can be problematic for cyclists at certain times of the day and in the summer when there is heavy tourist travel. A few participants said vehicle drivers may not give cyclists room to use a full lane. Even where bicycle lanes exist, riders might choose to use the sidewalk because, as one participant said, “You can’t trust the cars.” Traffic speed is also an issue. A few participants said biking in rural areas can be particularly dangerous.

“There are no bike lanes, so you need to swerve around cars, especially on Highway 61 in the summer.”

Other barriers

Several interview participants noted winter weather is a barrier to biking. Snow and ice make for poor bicycling conditions and restrict the road area available for cyclists if lanes and paths are not cleared.

Northeast Minnesota’s topography is also a barrier. A few interview participants cited the steep hills in Duluth specifically as barriers. Distance is also a factor, according to other participants. Finally, a few organizations that work with or represent older adults and people with disabilities said biking is difficult or infeasible for these groups.

Perceptions of bicycling

A few participants noted animosity toward bicyclists from drivers, saying “People in cars hate you for being in their way.” Other interview participants noted pushback from communities for proposed bicycle lanes in construction projects. One participant said someone whose primary mode of transportation is a bicycle can feel like “a second-class citizen if you aren’t in a car.”

Other transportation modes

Participants in most of the conversations also talked about a range of additional transportation options community members use or would if they had the opportunity. While less preferred and used than the transportation modes featured earlier in this section, these options nonetheless are notable and important for certain communities, such as is the case for medical transportation services and some people with disabilities, for example.

Paid ride-hailing services

Participants in two-thirds of conversations discussed paid ride-hailing services such as taxis, Lyft, and Uber. Participants most frequently cited availability and cost as the main challenges for community members who use or wish to use this mode of transportation.

While several participants reported taxis and ride-hailing services have a significant and positive impact on transportation and access for some community members, more than half cited a lack of availability and supply of these services in areas within the district, which limits their reach and impact. “A service like a taxi or Uber or Lyft could help,” said one participant in an area where these services are unavailable.

“There is no Uber and Lyft. I’ve never heard anybody ask about it, as they know it isn’t a possibility in this area. I’m a fan of it because of the flexibility. It could also be a means to earn some income. In Duluth, I’ve talked to people who said they can afford a new vehicle because of driving for Uber. I think it would get used quite a bit from my experience.”

Even in regions where these services are available, several participants noted taxis often have limited nighttime service and that Uber and Lyft often charge high prices at night. In addition, taxis and other paid ride-hailing services do not work for all riders; a few participants noted that these services aren’t accessible for some people with disabilities. A few noted, too, that drivers may require parents to supply their own car seats or booster seats if they are traveling with their young children.

The cost of paid ride-hailing services is a barrier for many members of the communities they represent and service, some participants said. The price may put these services out of reach for people who need them most because they lack access personal vehicles or other transportation options.

“One client had to take a cab to get to a job on time, but then spent all their income on cab fare and had to quit the job.”

A few participants also described issues of safety and accountability for taxis and ride-hailing services. “Who are cab companies accountable to?” asked one participant. “Some of the drivers encountered are rude, have attitudes, and are visibly intoxicated.”

Informal ridesharing and carpooling

Informal ridesharing and carpooling are common transportation modes for people who do not have personal vehicles and lack access to or cannot afford ride-hailing services. Participants in half the conversations mentioned these informal transportation options, with many emphasizing that people tap family and friends for informal ride arrangements. A few participants noted that faith communities serve as a common source of informal ridesharing, particularly for rides to church services and activities.

“Even though people might not have a vehicle, people are able to call upon someone to get a ride. They might call on a family member or use transit.”

A few participants noted that while informal ridesharing helps people with limited transportation options, it also leaves community members dependent on the goodwill of others, who may prove unreliable in helping community members get to where they need to go in order to meet essential needs. One participant described informal ridesharing as a “short term solution to a long-term problem” for many people. Another participant suggested that there should be better ways to match riders with people willing to drive or carpool.

Volunteer driver programs

In addition to informal ridesharing, formal volunteer driver programs run by nonprofit organizations and local governments serve community members with limited transportation options. Participants in about one-quarter of conversations mentioned these programs. Several participants noted that volunteer driver programs are sometimes connected with nonprofit organizations that offer other supportive services, and the programs fill transportation gaps alongside other options, such as medical transportation programs. Because they are often

offered by nonprofits that serve targeted populations, the volunteer driver programs may only be available to members of certain communities, such as disabled veterans, older adults, or people with living with specific medical conditions.

Some volunteer driving programs have difficulties recruiting drivers, particularly in cases when the sponsoring programs cannot reimburse drivers for their full costs. One other participant described the time it takes to clear drivers for programs as a barrier. Another participant noted that “volunteer drivers are difficult to find when insurance companies then want to register them as commercial drivers.”

“Clearing our volunteer drivers to drive for the program takes too long, up to months. We have a shortage of volunteer drivers.”

A few participants noted other limitations for volunteer driver programs. One reported that some volunteer drivers cannot accommodate riders using wheelchairs or in need of mobility assistance. Another said drivers may not be trained to support people with acute mental health issues. In addition, programs may have limited weekend availability and limited geographic coverage. “On weekends and holidays, it is harder to find volunteers,” one participant said. Another said, “Population centers under 10,000 people are tough to serve.”

Medical transportation

Participants in about one-third of conversations discussed medical transportation services, such as those funded by the state’s Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare programs to provide nonemergency transportation as part of the health plan coverage for Minnesotans with low incomes. In addition, a few participants mentioned transportation provided by health providers such as the US Department of Veterans Affairs for patients of that agency’s healthcare facilities. Participants emphasized that for those who are eligible, these services are vital but are often limited in scope, with restrictions based on type of health insurance coverage as well as type of medical appointment. In addition, a few participants cited scheduling limitations for these services. “Coordinating trips with doctor availability can be challenging,” one participant said.

Other services and modes

Participants in a few conversations talked about transportation services that nonprofit organizations operate as part of their mission to advance food security and reduce hunger among community members. These participants cited a number of ways organizations assist people with limited transportation options, including grocery delivery services, Meals on Wheels, and programs operated by food shelves.

A few participants talked about people using snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) both for recreation and as an alternative means of transportation. One participant mentioned scooters and talked about how they caused conflicts with pedestrians on sidewalks.

Public engagement

Nearly all District 1 transportation equity conversations included comments about public engagement. Most participants offered positive feedback on public engagement efforts by MnDOT and other government entities but almost all also cited barriers. Among the participants who answered a question about how informed they

felt about transportation projects relevant to their communities, about three in five said well informed and about two in five said not well informed. Several interview participants reported that engagement efforts with members of the communities they work with can be challenging because often those community members do not feel welcome at the table for public discussions and they do not feel government officials are listening to them if they do participate. A few Interview respondents reported positive engagement experiences with specific MnDOT projects—the Highway 23 bridge and the roundabout at Highways 169 and 37, for example. Community members felt well-informed about those projects and satisfied with the way the projects turned out.

Engagement Strategies

In nearly two-thirds of the conversations, participants shared positive comments about public engagement efforts around the district. They cited useful meetings and other successful engagement opportunities with MnDOT, local officials, state agencies, and health care organizations. Several participants talked about the success of engagement efforts that involved members of the communities they work with and represent, with some saying it is important for MnDOT and others meet people where they are. For example, they encouraged MnDOT to attend the meetings and events of the community groups, instead of holding separate public meetings that community members are expected to go to. One participant talked about MnDOT tapping into informal gathering efforts of communities, such as listening sessions in a coffee shop or open office hours at organizations that work with the communities.

“Go to where people are. Meet them in the community. Maybe [community members] don’t have time to go to a meeting in the evening, but if they know their commissioner is going to be at the [store] when they’re getting groceries or when they’re going for a coffee anyway, they might stop in and ask a question.”

Ways to communicate

Participants in most conversations talked about preferred ways to communicate information to their communities. Many pointed to social media as an effective tool, especially for residents with low incomes who are used to connecting to social media platforms through their phones. Others suggested the best ways to get information out is through local media sources—TV, newspapers, and radio. A few participants said word-of-mouth works best for members of the communities they work with. Participants noted several other ways to communicate with district residents, including through 511MN.org, community groups, churches, libraries, flyers and materials sent home from school with students, message and bulletin boards at the Post Office, grocery stores, and apartment buildings.

Outreach and engagement challenges

In almost half the conversations, participants talked about barriers community members face when it comes to public engagement opportunities by government agencies and others. Many of these participants said members from their communities either feel unwelcome at the table during public engagement discussions or cannot participate even if they would like to because of scheduling conflicts and complications.

A few participants said members of the communities they work with and represent simply do not have the time to be involved in engagement efforts because they are wrestling with challenges more central to their well-being and survival.

“Clients don’t feel important to the community because doors are usually shut on them.”

In a few conversations, participants reported that when community members join in at meetings and other engagement events, they feel that decisions were already made before they were asked for their input and conclude that no one is listening to their concerns and ideas. Several respondents talked about the belief among some communities that the government agencies and other groups that say they want public input but do not actually mean it. The quotes below illustrate this point:

- “Theoretically, they may realize they can provide input, but they realize their concerns won’t be heard as valid.”
- “The city... might ask for input, but they’ve already made up their mind and have no intention of actually using that input.”
- “They do [participate], but frustration levels with difficulties with system, processes, and ‘red tape’ inhibit [them from] reaching out.”
- “People in the communities we serve think nothing is going to get better for me. There is a sense of hopelessness within the community.”
- “It feels like they are at the mercy of the system.”
- “It’s not what you know. It’s who you know. People are well aware of whether they are going to be listened to. They usually throw up their hands and stop participating.”
- “My vote doesn’t count.”

A few participants pointed to specific groups that feel excluded from public engagement meetings and events. Based on when government agencies hold public meetings, those meetings might exclude people who work evening hours. Some people might be unable to participate because they have children and would need to secure childcare if they were to attend. Other participants said Black, Indigenous, and People of Color feel unwelcome. One participant reported that community members “say decisions are being made for them because they can’t make it to the table. How different would it look if they participated more? There is definitely a lack of sensitivity when it comes to race and ethnicity.”

Ways to improve outreach and engagement

Almost all participants provided suggestions for improving outreach and engagement, including a few who said MnDOT’s transportation equity conversations are a good start toward more inclusive public engagement and should be continued because these conversations “help people feel validated and acknowledged.”

Several participants talked about the willingness of community members to advocate when they feel passionate about an issue or see something that needs to be changed. “Members of the community do not say anything unless they are really passionate about it,” said one participant. Engaged, local champions from the community can help MnDOT avoid or overcome obstacles that might otherwise arise for projects.

“MnDOT needs to find a local champion for projects in communities. Finding local champions and leveraging their influence will let you reach a larger audience. They’ll have key connections and can be an advocate for projects.”

Some participants acknowledged the challenges involved in engaging communities that are not traditionally active and offered tips on ways to encourage more participation. Some of their ideas are as follows:

- “Transportation, childcare, and other needs have to be addressed for families to be involved. Families can be involved if an organization really puts in the effort, like going to the people instead of asking them to come to meetings.”
- “[M]ake the process of gathering input as welcoming as possible. We try to go to the people, go to where they want to be. Time and place matter. And it helps to bring refreshments.”
- “There is a limited number of people who are available to do this type of engagement with MnDOT. You need to work around our schedules. Go where people are. Try to get the majority there.”

Several participants noted it may take multiple attempts to engage some groups. Social media and phone calls may not work for some communities with members who lack consistent mobile phone access and do not have landlines. In this case, community members might get information from word-of-mouth or from printed materials that other community members share with them. Several participants said they do not think the outreach and communication from MnDOT and other government entities is adequate for the communities they work with and represent. According to one participant, “A little snippet on TV, on the news program, isn’t enough. I do read the paper every day, almost everything. There still isn’t enough... I mostly see plays, school events listed.”

Equity

MnDOT’s Advancing Transportation Equity initiative aims to better understand how the transportation system, services and decision-making processes help or hinder the lives of people in underserved and underrepresented communities in Minnesota. Equity is an important consideration for policy, planning, and operations.

Equity and transportation

Many conversation participants commented about how transportation advances equity for the communities they work with and represent—and how the lack of transportation limits equity. Most cited transportation as an important equity factor for access to jobs, with several noting that community members without reliable, low-cost transportation cannot pursue the employment opportunities that could stabilize their economic situations. A few said this is particularly true for people with low incomes who live in locations where housing is relatively affordable but nearby, accessible jobs pay low wages.

“Transportation can certainly enhance everyone’s ability to get to school, job opportunities, and health care. It all comes down to if you can get there or not.”

Participants also mentioned transportation advances or limits equitable access for community members to other important opportunities, activities, and services, beyond employment. Several talked about inequitable access to health care, including regular medical appointments. Several highlighted a lack of transportation as a barrier for access to grocery stores, affordable retail establishments, and services, including supportive social services. A few said transportation challenges limit access to educational opportunities, affordable housing, childcare, and social activities. One participant commented community members with low incomes who use public transit face

added burdens in general because of long travel times, including the time spent waiting for connections as they transfer from one bus route to another.

Participants offered the following ideas for improving transportation equity:

- Designated lanes and traffic-signal priority for buses as a way to speed up public transit
- Discounted or free bus passes for riders with low incomes, teens, and disabled veterans²⁸
- A nonprofit taxicab service, one that might be able to offer free trips to qualifying riders
- Grocery delivery services so those who cannot easily travel to stores can order groceries
- Telemedicine services to reduce the need for travel by those with limited transportation options
- Continued good work by MnDOT to secure grants and plan projects that meet community needs

Definitions of equity

“[Equity means] everyone has access to the level of care and service that is appropriate to them.”

Participants were asked what equity means to their organizations, and they offered a variety of perspectives in response. Most commonly, participants framed equity in terms of lowering barriers for the people and matching resources to their different levels of need. Participants in more than one-third of the conversations touched upon these concepts in their definitions of equity, citing the importance of providing appropriate levels of support and resources so that people in the communities they work with can overcome barriers and succeed. “Equity means recognizing that it is not a level playing field for everyone,” noted one participant.

Participants in several other conversations talked about equity in terms of service to all who need it regardless of their circumstances, including socioeconomic status, race, religion, age, and abilities. These participants spoke of being inclusive, providing quality service to all, and “not turning anyone down.” Several other participants used themes of equality and fairness in their explanations of equity, stressing equal access for all to opportunities, resources, and programs.

“Equity is tolerance for people of different backgrounds. It’s open doors.”

Other participants mentioned a range of different ideas tied to equity. One talked about equity as consultation with communities traditionally left out of the decision-making process, so that those communities are “at the table.” Another said equity involved “getting a fair shake” at transportation funding for community priorities. Another participant suggested that transportation equity for MnDOT should involve getting the word out about job openings at the agency and hiring more people of color.

Recommendations

Management and staff from MnDOT Central Office and District 1 participated in a virtual implementation planning meeting on Friday, June 5, 2020, to review findings from the transportation equity study. Prior to the meeting, attendees used an online survey to identify which of those findings fall within the agency’s sphere for

²⁸ Arrowhead Transit allows disabled veterans to ride for free.

influence and action.²⁹ At that June 5 session, meeting participants generated possible solutions and recommendations in small groups, and then the larger group voted on which ones should be the highest priorities for the agency.³⁰

Results from this meeting and observations from MAD consultants yielded the following recommendations:

1. MnDOT should continue to work with local partners to improve safety and accessibility for people who walk and bicycle to their destinations.

Almost all the community conversations touched on walking and biking, with participants emphasizing safety concerns, winter weather barriers, and the need for bicycle lanes and accessible sidewalk networks. The community conversations highlighted safety issues for walkers and bicyclists related to high vehicle speeds and traffic volumes, dangerous intersections, and locations with poor visibility. District 1 already works closely with local partners on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and will continue to do so. The MnDOT managers and staff at the implementation planning meeting came up with the following ideas to improve walking and bicycling:

- Use standalone projects to improve safety instead of waiting to address safety issues as part of bigger pavement projects that are farther out on the project timeline. Participants cited MnDOT’s Local Partnership Program (LPP) as an example that can improve collaboration between MnDOT and local agencies to fund projects in locations not included in current state highway funding programs.³¹
- Design bicycle and pedestrian corridors, especially those in urban areas, for easy snow removal and storage. Include plans for snow removal as part of project management, project design, and maintenance arrangements both for new bicycle or pedestrian infrastructure and for improvements to existing infrastructure. Coordinate between local governments and MnDOT and explore potential roles for community partners. Consider snow storage areas that would serve as a buffer between motorized vehicles and bicyclists and walkers. Participants in the community conversations identified uncleared snow and ice as barriers.
- Continue to coordinate with regional development organizations to support and help implement pedestrian and bicycle networks off the state’s trunk highways. Networks at these locations can be more beneficial than ones on the busy trunk highways. MnDOT should take a holistic view of these networks, one that includes county and city streets. Ideally, bicycle and pedestrian projects will be multi-jurisdictional to avoid piecemeal implementation for separate sections and to connect pedestrian and bicycle networks as a broader system. Participants in the community conversations cited walking and biking infrastructure as important.
- Increase MnDOT involvement with Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) and with local comprehensive land use plans. MnDOT staff should go beyond offering help with the funding applications for SRTS and other planned routes and attend local meetings to help communities determine implementation steps for walking and biking routes and to stay up to date on land use development as it happens.

²⁹ For the survey, MAD listed out findings grouped together by type and asked attendees to “Select the challenges or barriers you think MnDOT (D1 or CO) can reasonably influence.”

³⁰ For the results from the initial implementation planning meeting, refer to Appendix F on p. 60.

³¹ For more about the LPP, refer to

[https://www.dot.state.mn.us/stateaid/lpp.html#:~:text=The%20Local%20Partnership%20Program%20\(LPP,currently%20programmed%20on%20state%20highways.](https://www.dot.state.mn.us/stateaid/lpp.html#:~:text=The%20Local%20Partnership%20Program%20(LPP,currently%20programmed%20on%20state%20highways.)

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of District 1 project managers, with D1 maintenance playing a supporting role. Staff in the Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT) would take the lead for work with SRTS.

2. District 1 should continue and expand its in-person and virtual public engagement efforts to involve members of key, underserved communities and to learn about transportation issues and opportunities beyond those tied to planned MnDOT projects.

Participants in more than one-third of the community conversations reported that community members weren't well-informed about transportation projects, and participants in more than half the conversations cited barriers that community members face when it comes to providing public input, including a lack of time, scheduling conflicts and complications, and feeling unwelcome. Ideas from the District 1 implementation planning meeting for improving MnDOT public engagement included the following:

- Continue and expand outreach to underserved populations and incorporate the perspectives of the key communities more. This will help District 1 move forward from the community conversations conducted for this transportation equity project and build relationships with groups and organizations not traditionally engaged in transportation conversations, including both those involved in District 1's recent community conversations as well as others identified but not interviewed. Participants in the recent conversations noted that some members of their communities feel unwelcome at public meetings and events or are unable to attend because of scheduling conflicts. District 1 should reach out directly to transit users and other community members, structure and host inclusive public engagement sessions, and make sure people who engage with the district feel important and validated. District 1 also could partner with community organizations and neighborhood groups that have strong ties to key communities. As it does for cities and counties, the district could consider annual meetings with some communities to seek input on MnDOT plans for the years ahead.
- District 1 can build on opportunities and success from its regular engagement channels, such as the corridor study in Duluth and efforts to contract with community groups for engagement on the Twin Ports Interchange Project. To create a more consistent feedback loop, district staff should follow up with the community members who offer input in order to make sure they know they were heard and that their ideas were useful.
- Continue and expand broad public discussion about transportation challenges and opportunities beyond project-specific engagement. Doing so will help address concerns expressed in a few community conversations about public meetings where participants felt decisions were already made before they were asked for their input. MnDOT could hold more "coffee and conversation" events and other listening sessions. MnDOT can collaborate more with cities and counties on public engagement events and show up more often for conversations about transportation, even when those conversations aren't started by MnDOT.
- Meet people where they are at, rather than asking them to come to separate MnDOT meetings to engage on transportation issues. Participants in the community conversations made this point, suggesting that MnDOT attend the events and meetings of community groups. Social media and other virtual platforms allow MnDOT to host, record, and post public engagement sessions, and people are used to connecting in these ways, especially in the time of the coronavirus.
- Continue and expand engagement specifically with American Indian communities and their governments to explore transportation opportunities, identify infrastructure concerns, and capture input for projects both located on tribal land and affecting tribal communities. Statewide, MnDOT and the tribes engage in quarterly meetings of the Advocacy Council for Tribal Transportation and discuss roadway policies and issues involving roadways on or near Indian reservations. MnDOT also strives to consult annually with the different tribal governments. District 1 should improve and expand

coordination with tribal government staff and work with them to identify appropriate contacts for different transportation issues, as a way to broaden input. It works best for the district and agency to engage with tribal communities early so that staff know about community needs and wants before planning its projects and can factor them into planning efforts, including the 10-year plans. MnDOT should include infrastructure priorities from the tribal communities in its funding requests, as appropriate.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of District 1's public engagement coordinator, its project managers, and its planning staff, with other functional groups at District 1 playing a supporting role as needed.

3. MnDOT should work with transit providers and local officials to make transit travel safer and to increase the involvement of key, underserved communities in transit policy and decisions.

Participants in all the transportation equity conversations talked about the importance of transit to community members, and most said current transit service falls short of what is needed. Recognizing that transit providers and their parent organizations determine transit routes and hours of operation, MnDOT managers and staff at the implementation planning meeting focused on the following three areas as ones where the agency may have a role or influence:

- Prioritize staff and resources for snow removal on MnDOT rights-of-way where transit operates. MnDOT could also emphasize snow clearance concerns with its maintenance partners. Participants in almost half the community conversations talked about winter weather and snow as barriers for transit riders. Participants in the implementation planning meeting also suggested that MnDOT work with transit providers to review accessibility for transit routes and stops more generally, beyond snow in winter.
- Consider ways MnDOT can work with transit providers to boost availability and maintenance of bus shelters. Participants in the community conversations cited bus shelters, both for protecting transit riders from winter weather and for safety year-round if they are well it. When MnDOT comes into projects that involve transit providers, the agency can help ensure that those projects account for the range of transit needs, including shelters.
- Encourage learning and information sharing among the transit advisory committees (TAC) in District 1 as they consider diversity and equity. While some of the existing committees include representatives from key, underserved communities, some do not. OTAT can work with transit providers to review TAC participation, although TAC meetings are largely facilitated at the local level. The participants in the

- District 1 community conversations about transportation equity might be willing to serve on transit advisory committees.

For the part of this recommendation focused on snow removal, District 1 maintenance engineers are primarily responsible for assessing needs on the system and resources available, with OTAT getting feedback from transit directors regarding maintenance needs. For the part of this recommendation that relates to bus shelters, the District 1 facility engineer could coordinate with the Duluth Transit Authority and help with data for bus shelter capital needs, for which OTAT also has a role. And with regard to TACs, OTAT could take a lead role in collaborating with transit providers on learning and information sharing.

4. District 1 and MnDOT should explore ways to improve transit service in rural areas, in collaboration with Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs).

With just six percent of the state’s population spread across about 25 percent of the state’s land area, District 1 has many rural areas and places with low population density that make transit service difficult. Consequently, transportation is limited in much of the region for those without cars or driver’s licenses. MnDOT should work to improve transit in collaboration with the RTCCs. MnDOT, other state agencies, and local governments have established RTCCs in Greater Minnesota to fill transportation gaps for many of the key communities included in this transportation equity study and to improve coordination among transportation providers, social service providers, and the private sector. Participants in the implementation planning meeting shared the following ideas for rural transit:

- Work to increase the frequency of transit service and better match service hours to the job hours for people in rural areas who depend on transit.
- Consider increased use of small buses or vans for accessible rural transit, including accessible vehicles that do not require a commercial driver’s license (CDL) to operate—an advantage given the current shortage of CDL drivers.
- Explore and pursue flexible solutions to the issue that rural transit riders face when too few riders sign up in advance for travel on a transit route for a particular time or day, leading to the cancellation of transit trips that these riders need to make.
- Examine the need for accessible transit service and vehicles, particularly for people with wheelchairs.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of OTAT, which is already at work on several of these recommendations, and District 1 transit providers.

5. District 1 and MnDOT should enhance efforts to address infrastructure challenges that create transportation barriers, including disruption on routes during maintenance and construction.

MnDOT managers and staff at the implementation planning meeting suggested the following, regarding infrastructure:

- Elicit input early from communities as MnDOT focuses on the right fix for the right road at the right time. MnDOT carries out preventative maintenance and improves poor pavement conditions on structurally-sound roads where problems are limited to surface distress. This approach tackles immediate concerns and likely reduces the need for larger, costlier, and more disruptive projects later. Success in this regard reduces several infrastructure barriers cited during the community conversations, including closed routes, detours, and poor road conditions. Ensure that bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit vehicles continue to have access when route disruptions occur.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of District 1’s construction staff, for early staging and construction traffic concerns, and its project managers.

Appendix A: List of organizations interviewed

Individuals from the following 34 organizations and groups participated in 32 different conversations. One of the District 1 interviews included representatives from three organizations.

- Access North Center for Independent Living of Northeastern Minnesota
- African American leaders in Duluth
- Aitkin County CARE
- Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging
- Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency—Employment and Training
- Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency—Head Start
- Arrowhead Transit
- Boys & Girls Club of the Northland
- Care Partners of Cook County
- CareerForce—Cloquet (CareerForce is a collaborative partnership between the Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards, and the Governor’s Workforce Development Board)
- Duluth Community School Collaborative
- Duluth Public Schools—Community Education
- Duluth Transit Authority
- Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council
- Ely Area Food Shelf
- Ely Community Care Team
- Essentia Health Cancer Center
- Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Hibbing Area Transit & Dial-a-Ride
- Kootasca Community Action
- Lutheran Social Services
- Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
- Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans
- North Shore Area Partners
- North Shore Horizons
- Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training
- Pine County Veterans Services Office
- Safe Haven Shelter and Resource Center
- Sawtooth Mountain Clinic
- Second Harvest Northern Lakes Food Bank
- Vermillion Community College Disability Services
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- WE Health Clinic
- YWCA Duluth

Appendix B: Project team and interviewers

The following people were involved in elements of the planning, design, data collection, analysis, and implementation planning for the District 1 community conversations to advance transportation equity:

MnDOT District 1 staff:

- Bryan Anderson
- Sarah BaeHurst
- Todd Campbell
- Perry Collins
- Randy Costly
- Derek Frederickson
- Adrienne Hedlund
- Duane Hill
- Pat Huston
- Michael Kalnbach
- Doug Kerfeld
- Brian Larson
- Pippi Mayfield
- John McDonald
- James Miles
- Josie Olson
- Steve Oswald
- Alex Peritz
- Jill Pettis
- Maren Webb

MnDOT Central Office staff:

- Olivia Dorow Hovland
- Hally Turner
- Philip Schaffner
- Addison Coley
- Amber Dahlman
- Katherine Matusinec
- Tina Neary
- Jim Skoog
- Scott Shaffer
- Voni Vegar

MAD senior management consultants:

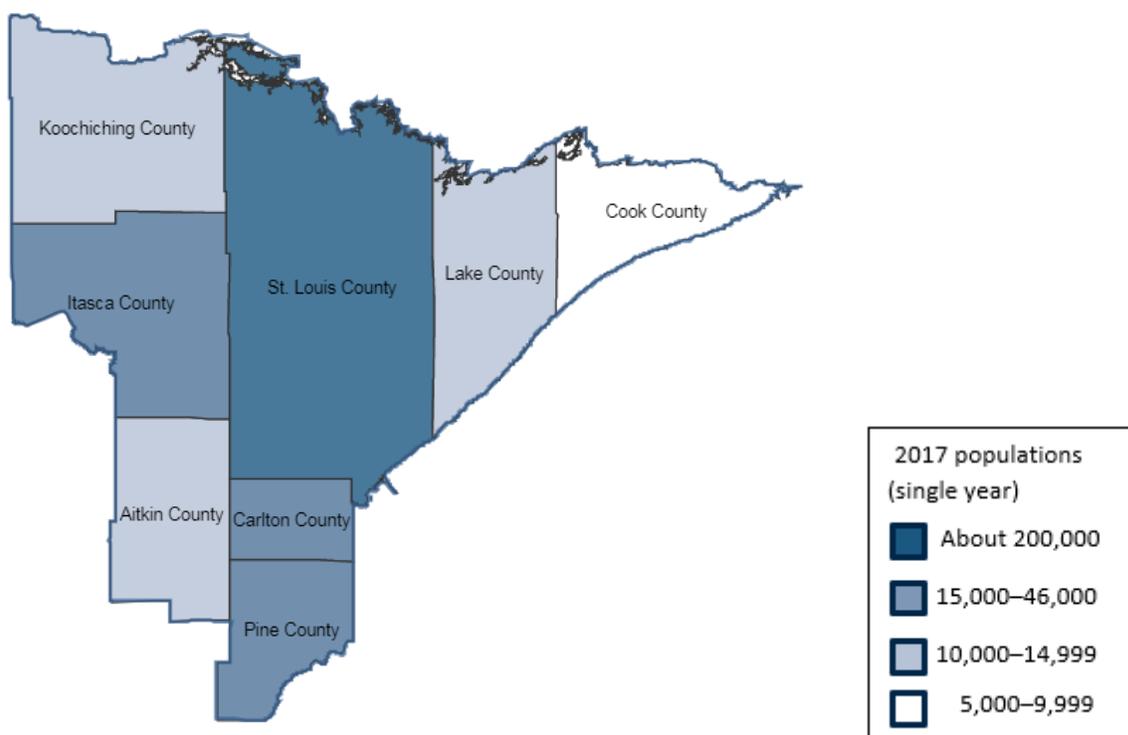
- Jessica Burke
- Jake Granholm
- Matt Kane
- Mariyam Naadha
- Abra Pollock
- Charlie Sellw

Appendix C: District 1 demographic analysis (fall 2019)

Overview

Located in the northeast region of the state, the Minnesota Department of Transportation’s District 1 includes all or parts of eight counties: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Pine, and St. Louis. Each county is included in the district’s Area Transportation Partnership, a group of transportation professionals and representatives convened by MnDOT and the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission to guide regional transportation planning efforts and prioritize the use of federal transportation funding in Northeast Minnesota. This demographic analysis presents District 1 characteristics based on data for the eight counties.³² Unless otherwise noted, the data in this document is derived from the Census Bureau’s five-year estimates for 2017.

Figure 3. Map of District 1 Counties and Populations



- **Total district population:** 354,500 people, or more than 6 percent of Minnesota’s population, based on 2017 estimates from the Minnesota State Demographic Center.³³

³² This analysis uses estimates in all cases except for data from the decennial census. Because they are estimates, counts and dollar levels are rounded to the nearest ten in the text of this analysis so as not to convey a false sense of precision.

³³ The 2017 estimates from the Minnesota State Demographic Center are used for all the data presented in this Overview section.

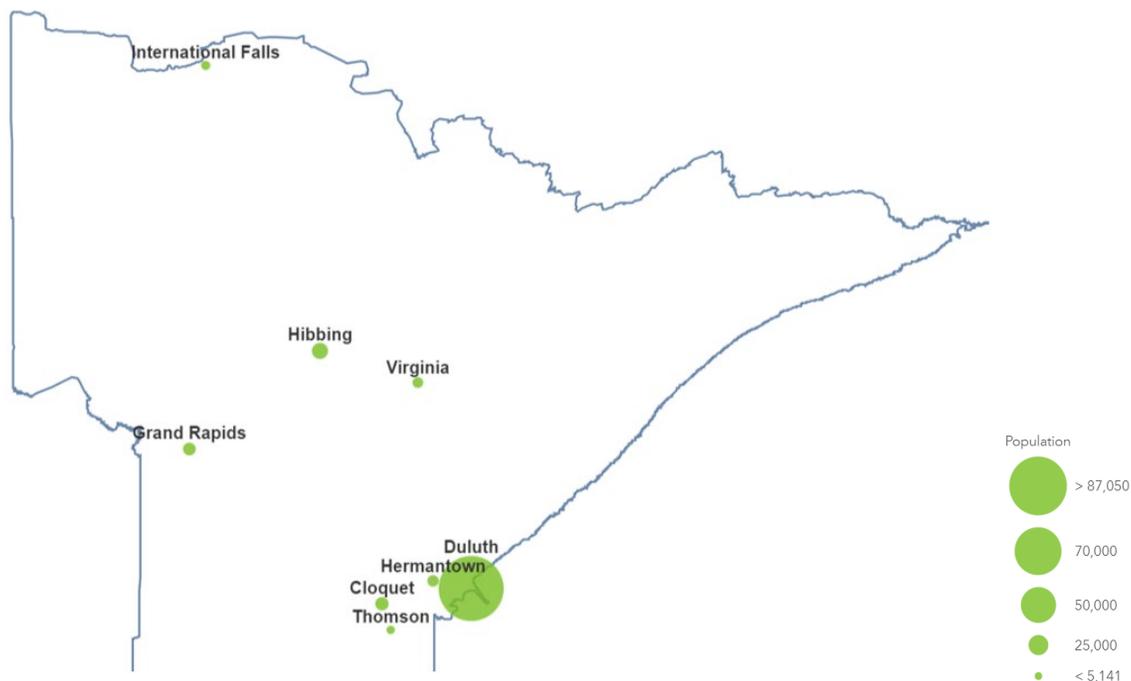
- **Total households:** 151,160 households, with average persons per household ranging from a low of 2.0 in Cook County to a high of almost 2.5 in Carlton County, compared with 2.4 statewide.
- **Largest counties by population:** St. Louis County, first, with 199,920 people, and Itasca County, second, with 45,350 people.
- **Largest city by population:** Duluth, in St. Louis County, with 87,050 people. The City of Duluth is part of the larger Duluth-Superior (Wisconsin) metropolitan statistical area, which has a total population of just under 280,000.

Since 2000, District 1’s population has increased by about 2 percent overall. By comparison, the overall population in Minnesota grew by about 13 percent during that same 17-year period. In District 1, five of the eight counties gained population, with Carlton gaining the most (13 percent). The population remained about even or decreased in three of the counties: Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis.

Table 2. Population by county

Geography	2000 census	2010 census	2017 estimates (single year)	Percent change 2000–2017
District 1	348,603	355,975	354,495	2%
Aitkin	15,301	16,202	15,821	3%
Carlton	31,671	35,386	35,655	13%
Cook	5,168	5,176	5,388	4%
Itasca	43,992	45,058	45,346	3%
Koochiching	14,355	13,311	12,640	-12%
Lake	11,058	10,866	10,531	-5%
Pine	26,530	29,750	29,192	10%
St. Louis	200,528	200,226	199,922	0%
State of Minnesota	4,919,492	5,303,925	5,577,487	13%

Figure 4. Map of the largest cities in District 1



More than half (56 percent) of the district’s population lives in St. Louis County, and another 13 percent lives in Itasca County. The City of Duluth (population 87,050) is more than five times the size of Hibbing (16,240), which is the next largest city in the district. Both cities are in St. Louis County. The table below lists the cities in District 1 with 5,000 or more people, based on 2017 census estimates.

Table 3. Cities in District 1 with a population over 5,000

City (County)	Population	Households
Duluth (St. Louis County)	87,050	36,605
Hibbing (St. Louis County)	16,236	7,478
Cloquet (Carlton County)	12,249	5,017
Grand Rapids (Itasca County)	11,389	5,002
Hermantown (St. Louis County)	9,539	3,611
Virginia (St. Louis County)	8,456	4,219
Itasca (Itasca County)	6,482	2,670
International Falls (Koochiching County)	6,151	2,868
Thomson (Carlton County)	5,141	1,891

Population characteristics

Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and Immigrants

- **Racial groups:** About 8 percent of District 1 residents identify in the Census Bureau’s racial categories of Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, or some other race aside from white. By comparison, those same Census categories account for about 14 percent of the population statewide. American Indian or Alaska Native is the largest (3 percent of residents) followed by Black or African American (1 percent). Almost 3 percent of the people in District 1 identify as being two or more races. For the City of Duluth, about 10 percent of the people identify as races other than white, with Black or African American accounting for the largest share (3 percent).
- **American Indians or Alaska Natives:**³⁴ The lands of five Minnesota Chippewa bands are within the geographic area for District 1’s Area Transportation Partnership, in whole or in part: Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, and Mille Lacs. Among the eight District 1 counties, the share of residents who identify as American Indian is higher than the statewide share (1 percent) in all but Lake County. In Cook County, 8 percent of the residents are American Indian.
- **Hispanic or Latino ethnicity:** Less than 2 percent of District 1 residents are Hispanic or Latino,³⁵ with the largest proportion in Carlton County, at 3 percent. Statewide, persons with Hispanic or Latino ethnicity account for more than 5 percent of the population.
- **Birthplace:** Of the district’s residents, 98 percent were born in the US and 78 percent were born in Minnesota. Across the entire state, 92 percent of residents were born in the US and 68 percent were born in Minnesota. For foreign-born, naturalized US citizens in District 1, Asia is the most common region of origin, followed by Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Asia is also the most common region of origin for foreign-born non-US citizens. For Minnesota as a whole, Asia is the most common region of

³⁴ The Census Bureau uses the racial category “American Indian or Alaska Native.” The demographic analysis presented here assumes that individuals within Minnesota’s borders who identify as members of that racial group are overwhelmingly American Indians.

³⁵ The Census Bureau uses “Hispanic or Latino” rather than the alternative “Latinx.”

origin for foreign-born, naturalized US citizens, and Latin America is the most common region for foreign-born non-US citizens.

- **English proficiency:** One percent of the people in District 1 speak English “less than very well.”³⁶ Statewide, the estimate is 5 percent.

Age

- **Youth:** Twenty percent of the district’s residents are under age 18, compared with 23 percent for Minnesota overall. Carlton County has the highest proportion of youth among the district’s eight counties, at 23 percent.
- **Older adults:** People age 65 and older account for 19 percent of the District 1 population, with Aitkin County recording the highest share of older people (31 percent). Statewide, 15 percent of the population is age 65 or older.

Disability

- **People with disabilities:** About 15 percent of people in District 1 have a disability.³⁷ The largest shares of people with disabilities are in Aitkin County (18 percent) and Pine County (17 percent), while the smallest proportion is in Carlton County (12 percent). Statewide, 11 percent of the population has a disability. Among District 1 residents age 65 and older, 33 percent have a disability, compared with 31 percent statewide.

Veterans

- **Veteran population:** Veterans make up about 10 percent of the district’s civilian population age 18 and older, compared with about 8 percent statewide. Aitkin County has the largest share of veterans (15 percent). Just more than half (51 percent) of the district’s veterans are age 65 and older, and 30 percent of all the veterans in the district have a disability, the same share as veterans statewide. More than half of District 1’s veterans with disabilities live in St. Louis County.

Educational attainment

Table 3 below compares the highest educational attainment in District 1 for the population age 25 and older with that of Minnesota as a whole.

³⁶ The Census Bureau uses the phrase “less than very well” to gather information about the English proficiency of those responding to its surveys.

³⁷ Census estimates for persons with a disability use the civilian, noninstitutionalized population. The American Community Survey asks respondents to answer questions covering six disability types: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty. Respondents who report any one of the six disability types are considered to have a disability. See more at [“How Disability Data are Collected from The American Community Survey.”](#)

Table 3. Highest educational attainment for population age 25 and older

Highest educational attainment	District 1	Minnesota
Less than high school diploma	7%	7%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	31%	25%
Some college, no degree	25%	21%
Associate’s degree	12%	11%
Bachelor’s degree	17%	23%
Graduate or professional degree	8%	12%

- **Highest level of education:** Ninety-three percent of District 1 residents have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, which is equal to the statewide share. However, the share of district residents with no more than their high school credential is higher (31 percent) than the share statewide (25 percent), while the share in the district is lower for bachelor’s degrees (17 percent, compared with 23 percent statewide) and graduate or professional degrees (8 percent, compared with 12 percent).
- **Higher education students:** Nine percent of the district’s civilian population age 18 and older is enrolled in college or graduate school, the same share as statewide. Among the counties, St. Louis County has the largest share of people enrolled in college and graduate or professional school, at 12 percent.³⁸

Income and labor force

- **Median household income:** The median, or midpoint, household income for the eight district counties is \$51,265, which is lower than the statewide median of \$65,700. Carlton County has the highest median household income (\$58,870), while Aitkin County has the lowest (\$45,860). In the City of Duluth, the median household income is \$47,230.
- **People in poverty:** Among the people in District 1, about 14 percent lives below the federal poverty level.³⁹ This is higher than the statewide percentage of 10 percent. Koochiching County has the largest share of people in poverty (17 percent), and Lake County has the smallest (9 percent). The poverty rate in the City of Duluth is 20.3 percent.
- **Labor force participation rate:** Labor force participation rates range from a high of 62 percent in St. Louis and Carlton Counties to a low of 49 percent in Aitkin County. By comparison, 70 percent of the state’s working-age population, 16 years and older, is in the labor force.
- **Working-age projections:** The working-age population, 16 years and older, in the district is projected to decline by 6 percent over the next 10 years.⁴⁰ In percentage terms, the 55-to-64 age group is projected to decline the most (down 29 percent), and the age group 75 and older is expected to grow the most (52 percent). The number of district residents in their prime working years from ages 25 through 54 is expected to hold steady over the next 10 years, although projections show variations among the counties. For example, the number of people ages 25 to 54 is projected to fall 8 percent in Koochiching County and grow 5 percent in Aitkin County.

³⁸ St. Louis County is home to University of Minnesota Duluth, Lake Superior College, and the College of St. Scholastica, all of which are in Duluth.

³⁹ According to the Census Bureau, a family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty if the family’s total income is less than the threshold calculated by the Census Bureau based on family size and composition.

⁴⁰ Minnesota State Demographic Center.

Table 4. District 1 working-age projections

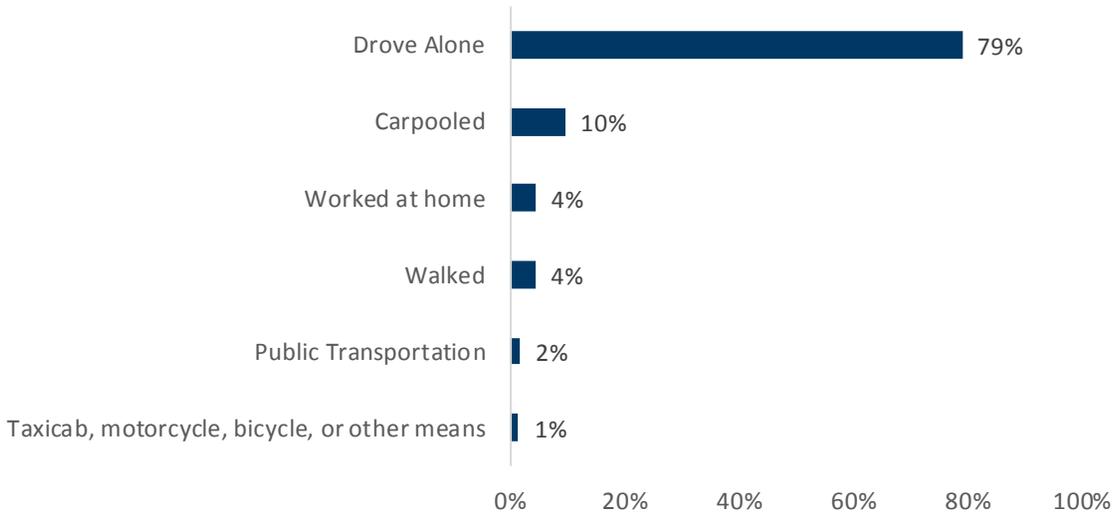
Age group	2020	2025	2030	Percent change 2020–2030
District 1	171,931	166,648	162,165	-6%
16 to 24	30,273	29,693	28,287	-7%
25 to 34	34,147	35,426	35,168	3%
35 to 44	32,578	32,284	32,869	1%
45 to 54	32,096	30,528	30,923	-4%
55 to 64	31,771	26,264	22,518	-29%
65 to 74	9,562	10,603	10,118	6%
75+	1,504	1,850	2,282	52%

Means of travel

- Households and vehicles:** In the district, almost 8 percent of households (11,420) have no vehicles, which is about the same as the statewide average of 7 percent. Cook County (11 percent) and St. Louis County (9 percent) have the greatest proportions of households without vehicles. For households with vehicles, 30 percent (44,810 households) have one vehicle and 63 percent (94,080 households) have two or more vehicles.⁴¹
- Traveling to work:** Over three-quarters (79 percent) of workers age 16 and older drive alone to work, which is about the same level for the state as a whole (78 percent). Koochiching and Pine Counties have the largest share of workers who carpool to their jobs (14 percent, compared with 10 percent districtwide). Less than 2 percent of commuters in the district use public transportation, and three of the eight District 1 counties do not have public transit providers. Four percent of the workers in the district walk to their jobs, including 5 percent in St. Louis County.

⁴¹ The Census Bureau’s count of households by county for data on vehicles by household differs slightly from the overall count of households by county.

Figure 4. Means of travel to work



- Commuter times:** In District 1, 41 percent of workers age 16 and older who do not work from home have a commute time of less than 15 minutes, compared with 31 percent for all Minnesota workers. Almost one-quarter (24 percent) of the district’s workers have commutes of 30 minutes or more, compared with almost a third (32 percent) statewide. Koochiching County has the largest proportion of workers commuting less than 15 minutes (68 percent), and Pine County has the largest proportion commuting 30 minutes or more (39 percent).

Table 5. Selected demographic data for District 1 counties based on five-year census estimates

County	Total population	Population of race other than white	Percent under 18	Percent 65 and older	Percent disabled	Average median household income	Percent in poverty	Zero-vehicle households
Aitkin	15,841	5%	17%	31%	18%	\$45,860	12%	5%
Carlton	35,408	11%	23%	16%	12%	\$58,874	12%	5%
Cook	5,270	13%	15%	26%	14%	\$51,903	13%	11%
Itasca	45,237	7%	21%	21%	15%	\$52,050	13%	5%
Koochiching	12,776	6%	19%	22%	17%	\$47,131	17%	7%
Lake	10,578	3%	18%	24%	13%	\$56,078	9%	6%
Pine	29,057	9%	20%	19%	17%	\$47,285	14%	5%
St. Louis	200,294	8%	19%	18%	14%	\$50,936	15%	9%

Appendix D: Advancing Transportation Equity project—key communities for conversations (fall 2019)

This document summarizes key communities within District 1 for potential inclusion in the Advancing Transportation Equity project.⁴² The goal of this document is to provide a starting point for interviewee identification. Key populations were identified based on the current demographics and trends in the district and incorporate populations with known inequities, including those relevant to the US Environmental Protection Agency’s efforts to achieve environmental justice in accordance with Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act.

It is important to recognize that these groups are not discrete. Their transportation concerns often overlap, and a potential interviewee may represent multiple groups. Additionally, an individual may belong to more than one of the communities identified and may experience overlapping inequities.

Overview of District 1

Located in Northeast Minnesota, MnDOT’s District 1 is made up of eight counties. Combined, these counties represent about a quarter of Minnesota’s total land area and nearly 6 percent of the state’s total population. More than half of the district’s population lives in St. Louis County (199,922 residents). In St. Louis County, Duluth is the largest city, with a population of 87,050; that count is 70,000 greater than the population of the district’s next-largest city, Hibbing (16,236).

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Biased policies and practices of the past have contributed to employment, wealth, and education inequities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color living in Minnesota. Inequities specific to transportation include issues of access, safety, and participation in decision-making.

Around 8 percent of District 1 residents belong to racial groups other than white. American Indians account for the largest racial group (3 percent), followed by Black or African American residents (1 percent). The lands of five different Chippewa bands are within the borders of District 1’s Area Transportation Partnership. All but one of the district’s counties (Lake County) have a higher proportion of American Indians than the state of Minnesota, where the share stands at 1 percent. In Cook County, 8 percent of the population is American Indian. Transportation inequities, such as pedestrian safety and access to multimodal transportation options on reservations, should be an important consideration of this project.

⁴²For this analysis, MAD drew upon the most recent five-year census data at the time, from the American Community Survey results for 2013–2017, and related data sources.

Since 2000, District 1's population of residents in racial groups other than white has increased 46 percent, while it increased 72 percent statewide during the same period. The number of Black or African American residents in the district increased 95 percent (from a very small base of 2,512 to 4,897).

Among all racial groups, less than 2 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino. Carlton County has the largest proportions of Hispanic or Latino residents (3 percent).

One percent of the people in District 1 speak English less than very well. Statewide, the estimate is 5 percent.

Women and girls

Women of all ages make up 49 percent of District 1's population. This is similar to their proportion for the state. A common transportation concern for women is safety, such as walking to and waiting for public transit, especially at night. Other transportation issues include consideration of travel needs and patterns due to the importance of women's role in child-rearing and household management, women's share in the aging population, and cultural differences that may affect immigrant women. These factors should be considered as part of this project.

Older adults and those aging in place

About 19 percent of the population in District 1 is over age 65, which is slightly higher than the statewide percentage of 15 percent. Carlton County leads with 23 percent of its population ages 65 and older. People 75 and older in District 1 are projected to increase more than 50 percent by 2030. Particular concerns for these groups include transportation needed to access services and care providers, which should be taken into consideration as part of this project.

People with low incomes (living in poverty)

Top transportation equity concerns for low-income households are the ability to access jobs, services, and other opportunities. About 14 percent of the people in District 1 have incomes lower than the federal poverty level, which is higher than the statewide percentage of 10 percent. The average median household income in the district is \$51,265 (in 2017 dollars), which is lower than the statewide median household income of \$65,700. Carlton County has the highest median household income (\$58,874), while Aitkin County has the lowest (\$47,230).

Zero-vehicle households

Around 8 percent of households in District 1 do not have a vehicle. Cook County (11 percent) and St. Louis County (9 percent) have higher proportions of households without vehicles than the district as a whole. Equity concerns with zero-vehicle households are related to access to jobs and other opportunities. The availability and frequency of transit service, in addition to bicycling and walking options, are important when considering the transportation needs of zero-vehicle households. It will be important to investigate overlaps between race, income, and gender with zero-vehicle households.

People living with disabilities

People with disabilities account for about 15 percent of the district’s population, slightly more than the statewide percentage (11 percent). One-third of people 65 and older in the district have a disability, which is slightly more than the statewide percentage (31 percent). This District 1 project should consider the transportation experience of people with disabilities that relate to the following: hearing, vision, cognitive abilities, ambulatory abilities, and self-care or independent living. Better understanding the nuanced transportation experiences of people with disabilities will help ensure that these individuals are able to travel with ease and access on par with people who do not have disabilities.

Veterans

Military veterans make up 10 percent of the population in District 1. More than half of the district’s veterans are age 65 and older, and 30 percent have a disability—the same as the statewide percentage. More than half of the disabled veterans in the district live in St. Louis County. In addition to mobility concerns, access to veteran’s services in District 1 should also be considered as part of this project.

Other communities and organizations for consideration

Information is not readily available for all demographic groups. In some cases, data is not regularly collected and reported, or individuals may not feel comfortable providing information. However, this lack of data does not imply that other communities experience no transportation inequities. The list below identifies other potential communities for consideration in the District 1 Advancing Transportation Equity project:

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual
- People released from incarceration
- People experiencing homelessness
- People experiencing chemical dependency and other addictions

Other types of organizations to consider for the District 1 transportation equity project include:

- Colleges and universities: St. Louis County is home to many colleges and universities, including Lake Superior College (Duluth), Hibbing Community College (Hibbing), Vermillion Community College (Ely), and Mesabi Range College (Eveleth, Virginia); Carlton County has the Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College in Cloquet; Itasca County has Itasca Community College in Grand Rapids; and Koochiching County’s International Falls has Rainy River Community College.
- Providers of support services for victims of domestic violence
- Public and nonprofit housing assistance organizations such as public housing agencies and community action partnerships that focus on housing
- Regional health care providers including St. Luke’s hospital and the Essentia Health provider system.

Appendix E: Transportation equity

interview guide

Interviewers used the following questions for their conversations and used a guide with instructions regarding probes and follow-ups to further explore topic areas.

1. Broadly speaking, what are some of the challenges facing the community or communities you serve or represent?
2. Which transportation modes are most often used by the community to carry out day-to-day activities, such as work, school, shopping, health care appointments, and social and cultural activities?
3. Which modes of transportation are most critical for people and what challenges do they encounter in accessing these modes? What locations, if any, are particularly difficult to get to?
4. Do members of the community face infrastructure challenges that create transportation barriers or hinder travel, such as road conditions or a lack of direct routes to important destinations?
5. How well or poorly are transit and other forms of public transportation in your area meeting the needs of the community?
6. How well or poorly are the opportunities for non-motorized transportation, such as biking and walking, meeting the needs of the community?
7. What safety concerns, if any, does the community have with regard to transportation?
8. What does equity mean to your organization?
9. How can transportation advance opportunities for members of the community?
10. Can you describe a transportation project or program that had an impact on the community your organization serves or represents? How was the community involved in the decision-making?

Appendix F: Initial findings and potential solutions from Implementation Planning Meeting 1

MnDOT Central Office and District 1 management team and staff participated in a virtual implementation meeting on June 5, 2020, to review the study's findings. Prior to the meeting, MAD invited meeting attendees from District 1 and MnDOT's Central Office to complete a survey that asked respondents to select which findings are within the agency's sphere of influence. At the meeting, participants generated potential solutions in small groups (listed in the next section), and then the larger group voted on which of these solutions should be the highest priorities for the agency. **Proposed solutions that received participant votes appear in bold**, with the number of votes listed afterward in parentheses.

Finding: Rural residents

- Long distances between destinations in rural areas that make travel difficult, both for trips by car and via regional transit
- A lack of services and retail establishments, including hospitals and grocery stores
- Low population density that limits transit and other transportation options for those who don't own cars or cannot drive

Potential solutions:

- **Improve access to transit. (5 votes)**
 - **Match transit hours with employment hours.**
 - **Flexibility beyond runs based on volume; buses won't run without a certain number of passengers.**
 - **Big boost in funding for vans and drivers. Services are well used.**
 - **Need for accessible services and vehicles (for example, transit provider for one community could not transport someone in a wheelchair to Duluth)**
 - **Increase transit frequency (for example, hours per day, days per week).**
 - **Collaborate with Regional Transit Coordinating Councils.**
- **Invest in remote broadband. (2 votes)**
- **Insurance resources for transportation (1 vote)**
- Partner to encourage expansion of telehealth services.
- Volunteer driver programs:
 - More training for volunteers to increase level of comfort
 - Recruitment strategies for more drivers
 - Explore opportunities to expand access to transportation funding available through insurance.
 - Need to change coverage options for volunteer driver program
- Explore opportunities to share the resources available, including vans.
- Ways to vet services that are safe for physical health, mental health, and general transportation (for example, YWCA vets transportation for women and small children in Duluth).

Finding: Public transit and barriers to use

- Accessibility barriers for transit riders include the lack of curb cuts on sidewalks, poor or delayed snow removal at and around bus stops, and parking lots poorly designed for pickup and drop-off.
- Busy roads and intersections at some locations make it difficult and dangerous for people to get to and from transit vehicles.
- Difficulties navigating transit systems, especially for older adults
- Safety concerns: a lack of bus shelters, the location of certain bus stops, and poor lighting at bus shelters

Potential solutions:

- **Assess the resources needed to take responsibility for snow removal and develop a plan to request resources to do this. (8 votes)**
- **Recommend diversity on transit advisory committees. (3 votes)**
 - Under discussion with OTAT
 - Some have a diverse group represented, but some do not.
 - Some of the groups that were interviewed for this study may be willing to be included.
- **Bus shelters (3 votes)**
 - Make sure that transit needs and pedestrians are being accounted for when MnDOT comes in with a project.
 - This issue is primarily the responsibility of transit providers and systems.
 - Funding is linked to the State Multimodal Transportation Plans (SMTP).
 - OTAT does site visits to transit facilities for rural transit systems and might be able to incorporate bus shelter assessments into this.
 - If transit systems apply for a capital grant, these facilities would fall under OTAT's site visits.
- **Consider a process to work with transit providers: review their common routes, stops, and pedestrian and bicycling access to their stop locations (from the perspective of accessibility). (1 vote)**
- Train drivers to stop at rectangular rapid flash beacons (RRFBs) and strengthen crosswalk laws.
- Highlight best practices and useful examples for transit systems:
 - To enhance what they have for the public—helping potential transit users understand the transit system
 - Provide technical assistance to transit systems.
 - Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs) have a workplace program on user training—have “guides” who will help train people new to transit.

Finding: Infrastructure barriers

- More attention to roadway safety concerns at locations that disproportionately affected American Indians
- Road conditions that make travel difficult—mostly poor pavement, often on county and local roads
- Maintenance, repair, and construction projects that restrict travel on commonly used routes

Potential solutions:

- **Right fixes for the right roads (3 votes)**
 - Use right fixes for the right roads to keep projects timely and reduce the need for high-cost projects.
- **Infrastructure concerns of the American Indian communities (3 votes)**
 - Public engagement and get tribal communities involved

- **10-year plans: the more we can engage ahead of time to identify the needs and wants of the communities the better**
- **Funding appeals from legislators**
- **Poor pavement (1 vote)**
 - **More shelf projects if we get extra funding**
 - **Research funding to help with safety concerns (for research and projects)**
 - **Funding for the Highway Safety Improvement Program (need to do engagement ahead of time)**
- Local county road infrastructure
 - Some are state aid—can influence or get more funding
 - Coordination and partnerships with local authorities (to load projects together) to help with costs

Finding: Walking and bicycling

- Uncleared snow and ice on sidewalks make walking difficult or impossible at times in the winter.
- The time that traffic signals allow for pedestrians to cross roadways is too short for older adults and those with mobility issues.
- A lack of dedicated bicycle lanes hinders bicycle use, as does poor signage and lighting on the existing dedicated lanes and routes.
- Safety concern: Volume of traffic and speed of vehicles along some pedestrian routes
- Pedestrians face infrastructure barriers, including incomplete sidewalk systems and sidewalks in disrepair.
- Safety is a concern where bicycle riders mix with motor vehicle traffic and where there are high travel speeds and traffic volumes.
- Snow and ice make for poor bicycling conditions and restrict the road area available for cyclists if lanes and paths are not cleared.
- Poor access to sidewalks because of uncleared snow and a lack of curb cuts, especially for people with disabilities

Potential solutions:

- **Design for snow storage, especially in urban areas, with “amenity zone” buffers between paths and travel lanes. (9 votes)**
 - **Increased focus on shoulder and sidewalk maintenance, snow clearance**
- **Be more open to doing standalone safety projects if the pavement projects are farther out on the timeline. (8 votes)**
 - **Interim projects that are small and targeted have immediate impact, see LPP programs, focus on increasing safety.**
- **Support networks off the trunk highway(s) where they are more beneficial, through coordination with RDCs to help with ongoing implementation of plans. (4 votes)**
 - **A holistic view of the system, including county and city streets**
- **Increase involvement with Safe Routes to Schools and local comp plans. (4 votes)**
 - **Right now, we have people apply for dollars. In the future, we should attend meetings that help determine implementation steps.**
- **Lighting for pedestrians increases sense of safety while walking at night. Rework MnDOT’s policy with regard to this. (1 vote)**
 - **This is an essential element of the pedestrian mode of transportation.**

Finding: Public engagement

- Members of some communities don't feel welcome at public discussions and don't feel officials are listening to them.
- A general lack of racial and ethnic diversity at meetings and among the decision-makers when it comes to transportation

Potential solutions:

- **Moving past project-specific engagement (14 votes)**
 - **Get ahead of projects, understanding problems and issues before project is selected**
 - **Hold "coffee and conversations" sessions (less formal).**
 - **Collaborate with cities and counties to hold events.**
 - **Reach out earlier, involve the public in identifying issues and goals before there's a project,(but it's hard to keep them interested without a project).**
- **Virtually meet people where they are. (5 votes)**
 - **Record and post online meetings on websites.**
 - **Collaborate with community-based organizations.**
- **Incorporate more perspectives of key communities. (2 votes)**
 - **Reach out not only to representatives of communities but to community members themselves (members of organizations, transit users) to get perspective of lived experience.**
- **Make the most of opportunities for engagement (for example, the Twin Ports interchange project, the corridor study in Duluth). (1 vote)**
- **Better reach underserved populations. (1 vote)**
 - **Be inclusive in meetings.**
 - **Advertise broadly.**
 - **Give clear expectations on the spectrum of meetings, public engagement.**
 - **Make sure people feel validated and important. Circle back after feedback is received with what you heard and how you used it.**

Appendix G: Additional suggested organizations, programs

The table below lists the organizations and programs that either interview participants suggested for additional conversations about transportation equity or that MnDOT staff or MAD consultants identified as potential organizations of interest for such conversations. The list does not include the organizations MAD contacted for interviews but that did not respond, declined, or were unable to schedule interview times. District 1 staff may wish to contact some of the organizations and programs below in the future to expand the community conversations and explore additional topics that arise from the findings and recommendations of this report.

Table 1. Organizations and programs of potential interest for transportation equity conversations

Organization	City
A to B Taxi	Ely
Age Well Arrowhead	Duluth
Aitkin County Health and Human Services	Aitkin
Angels of McGregor	McGregor
ARC Northland	Duluth
Assertive Community Treatment Teams	Programs offered by several agencies in Aitkin, Carlton, and St. Louis Counties
Babbitt Senior Center	Babbitt
Bureau of Indian Affairs	Bloomington
Churches United in Ministry (CHUM)	Duluth
Community Partners	Two Harbors
Cook County Social Services	Grand Marais
Dabinoo'Igan	Duluth

Organization	City
Disabled American Veterans—Russo-Golob Chapter 3	Virginia
Duluth Bike Coalition	Duluth
Ecolibrium3	Duluth
Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College	Cloquet
Fruit of the Vine Vineyard Church Community Food Shelf	Duluth
Girl Scouts Lakes and Pines	Duluth
Healthy Northland SHIP	Duluth
Hibbing Community College Disability Services	Hibbing
Human Development Center	Duluth
The Hub/Grand Marais Senior Center	Grand Marais
Itasca Community College—Disability Services	Grand Rapids
Itasca Resource Center	Grand Rapids
Lake County Ambulance Service	Two Harbors
Lake County Developmental Achievement Center	Two Harbors
Lake Superior Community Health Center	Duluth
League of Women Voters	Duluth
Lighthouse Center for Vision Loss	Duluth
Mesabi Range College—Diversity Committee	Virginia
Northwoods Partners Senior Services	Duluth

Organization	City
Planned Parenthood—Duluth Clinic	Duluth
Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault	Duluth
Rainy River Community College—Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	International Falls
Ruby’s Pantry	Various locations in District 1
St. Luke’s Health System	Duluth
Salvation Army	Duluth
Scenic Rivers Health Services	Various locations in District 1
Tender Loving Care	Duluth
Tribal Veteran Service Officers	Various locations in District 1
Udac, Inc.	Duluth
University of Minnesota Duluth	Duluth
Vocational Rehabilitation Services—Duluth	Duluth
Zeitgeist Center for Arts and Community	Duluth