

Rethinking I-94 Phase 2 Community Conversations

Date: 11/16/2021 (4:00pm-5:00pm)

Location: Zoom Meeting

Presentation Summary

Presenters:

Brad Hamilton (WSB)

Sheila Kauppi (MnDOT)

Gloria Jeff (MnDOT)

1. Introduction and welcome

2. Agenda

- a. Welcome
- b. Project overview and schedule
- c. Study process
- d. Livability
- e. Project limits
- f. Draft statement of goals
- g. Draft project needs
- h. Draft project purpose
- i. Conversation

3. Project Schedule

- a. Sheila Kauppi emphasized that MnDOT wants to hear from all voices of people who use the corridor
- b. The virtual open house started mid-summer
 - i. People can view and comment on the draft documents
- c. The project schedule is long - it is a journey, and we are early. We are currently in phase 2. We started in 2016. We are not thinking of construction projects until 2026 or later.
- d. Phase 1: Community engagement was from 2016-2018
 - i. There was a healing ceremony 2016
 1. MnDOT committed to be better
 - ii. We asked people what is important to communities through surveys, community conversations, meetings etc.
 - iii. Communities were interested in issues beyond the freeway
 - iv. MnDOT asked how do communities learn and make decisions?
 1. MnDOT is still learning the answers to these questions and this framework is the basis for phase 2
 - v. Communities wanted to be consulted early and often

- vi. Community members want their values and visions to be reflected and designs
- vii. On our website we have a tab called 'Phase 1' where people can read more about it
- viii. We committed in 2016 to work differently and that we would listen

4. MnDOT's roles

- a. Leader – issues related to the I-94 itself
 - i. Our primary mission is to oversee the highway system
 - 1. Includes pavement and bridges
- b. Partner – issues or situations that cross over agency disciplines or missions
 - i. Local roads that might connect to a MnDOT roadway or a bridge that goes over the highway
- c. Facilitator – Issues not under MnDOT control but can assist for the broader health of communities
 - i. This is important because people are interested in things beyond the freeway

5. Study process

- a. We have not made any decisions yet
 - i. We are very early in the project
 - 1. The earliest projects may start in 2026
- b. Transparency takes a lot of time
- c. Information and feedback from phase 1 helps inform phase 2
- d. We are committed being transparent and incorporating feedback
 - i. There are several pathways that this project will take
 - 1. Pathway 1
 - a. Transportation improvements
 - b. Set forth a vision for the I-94 corridor
 - i. Transportation purpose and need
 - ii. Evaluation criteria
 - iii. Alternatives
 - 2. Pathway 2
 - a. Livability framework
 - i. Sense of place
 - ii. Equity
 - iii. Economics
 - iv. Connections
 - v. Health and Environment
 - ii. Scoping Document
 - 1. MEPA
 - a. Very high level look at I-94
 - b. What are access interchange alternatives?
 - c. Where are entrances and exits?
 - iii. Tier 1
 - 1. Livability
 - iv. Tier 2
 - 1. This is where we will have a program of projects

6. Livability

- a. Livability is very important to the project
 - i. We created this division to help guide the project
- b. Livability is not a singular concept
 - i. Livability is utilizing transportation services and facilities to achieve goals
 - ii. Looks at neighborhoods and communities as a whole
- c. 7 elements that were identified in phase 1
 - i. Health and Environment
 - ii. Economics
 - iii. Sense of Place
 - iv. Safety
 - v. Equity
 - vi. Connections
 - vii. Trust
 - viii. These guide what the metro district does with transportation projects
- d. MnDOT hosts Livability Workshops and writes papers on those workshops
 - i. Community members and their designated leaders are constantly in consult through monthly workshops focused on individual pillars
 - 1. Host conversations, surveys about the pillar what it means to them etc
 - 2. This will help us create balanced solutions

7. Project limits

- a. Between highway 55 (Hiawatha) and Marion Street in Saint Paul
 - i. 35K residents
 - ii. 24k employers
 - iii. 1300 businesses

8. Draft statement of goals

- a. MnDOT wants to do things differently
 - i. We are prioritizing the wellbeing of those who live work and play along the corridor
 - ii. Enhancing mobility and safety on and along the corridor
- b. Livability framework is incorporated into draft statement of goals
 - i. Health and Environment
 - ii. Economics
 - iii. Sense of Place
 - iv. Safety
 - v. Equity
 - vi. Connections
 - vii. Trust

9. Draft project needs

- i. Safety
- ii. Bridge condition
- iii. Retaining wall condition
- iv. Pavement condition
- v. Mobility

- vi. Drainage condition
- vii. Noise wall condition
- viii. Safety on intersecting streets
- ix. Walkability/Bikeability
- x. Drainage Capacity

10. Draft project purpose

- i. Improve asset conditions of I-94 bridges, pavements and supporting infrastructure
- ii. Enhance safety for people and goods on, along, and across the I-94 corridor
- iii. Improve the mobility of people and goods on, along and across the I-94 corridor.

11. Draft evaluation criteria

- a. Alternative proposals will be measured against the following draft criteria:
 - i. Project needs
 - ii. SEE Impacts
 - iii. Project goals and livability pillars

Conversations

Comment: Could you clarify ‘Asset Conditions’? What do they mean?

MnDOT Response: Asset conditions reference the physical infrastructure. Pavement, drainage, bridges, noise walls – that criteria asks, ‘what is the condition of the physical infrastructure?’

Comment: In March of this year, MnDOT put out a goal to reduce VMT by 20% by the year 2050, what impact will that goal have on Rethinking I-94 if any?

MnDOT Response: Reduction of VMT was a recommendation from our sustainability group. We are still doing work to determine how that may be achieved at a state and corridor level. It’s a collaborative effort and climate is important to us, but we also recognize that goods need to be delivered and people still need to get around. We are early in our journey; this project does not have any specific VMT goals.

MnDOT Response: The sustainability advisory committee had an excellent goal in mind, and we are currently looking at what that looks like in implementation – we are looking at proposed projects between now and 2050 and figuring out how we can incorporate that reduction into different projects. We expect to have direction in 12 to 18 months.

Comment: I live half a block from I-94 and I work a block away from I-94. How are you addressing and mitigating the impact of what happens when the freeway is crowded, and the side streets end up as overflow routes for the highway?

MnDOT Response: The intent of the livability framework made it very clear that we needed to look beyond the freeway. There are limitations on us as a single agency, so we want to engage our city and county partners. We are also looking at the impacts on the side streets for vehicles, pedestrians and rollers.

Comment: I am concerned about the separation the NEPA process and the livability initiative. If you want to build a durable coalition – then what you want to do is create a master plan and include both sides of it and both sides move together at the same time

MnDOT Response: Through the PAC and many meetings and coalitions we work very closely with cities, counties

Comment: How do citizens know about this process and learn about opportunities to give feedback? How do we project implications of climate change when we are planning a project like this?

MnDOT Response: We have many things about the project on the website. We have Community Leaders' Meetings, Policy Advisory Meetings, an online open house etc. We look at not just the conditions today but the environment in 20 years and 30 years of the investments we make. We do projections in collaborations and issues such as climate come into the issues. We balance people who are worried about the climate and the future and those who are worried about transportation problems of today.

Comment: How will the land bridge effect the Rethinking I-94?

MnDOT Response: We work closely with reconnect rondo. We know there are many details that need to be figured out – that particular project is being led by the local community.

MnDOT Response: The land bridge is also about economic and cultural vitality of the largest black settlement in the state – it is also lead by the community – we have an appropriately collaborative relationship.

WSB Response: The environmental process will take into account the work of Reconnect Rondo – this will be taken into account via a future condition consideration, and it will shape how we will evaluate future alternatives.

Comment: I have not gotten used to the sound of the freeway – to what extent is sound mitigation a commitment to the project? As we move forward if the US decides to get serious about climate change, will this project reflect the climate change policy?

MnDOT Response: MnDOT is exploring the ways we can use federal funds for climate change projects. MnDOT may utilize federal funds for things like electric vehicles to reduce greenhouse gasses, we may modify approaches to fit our constituents because there is no one size fits all. We will adapt as needed to climate regulations.

WSB Response: Environmental things are moving targets – things like electric vehicles will be taken into consideration. Noise analysis will be done along the corridor; we will look at the sound under no build conditions and then sound conditions of several alternatives. If we are changing the capacity of the highway, that would trigger those noise thresholds and then noise mitigation will be looked at.

Comment: I'm very concerned about the Snelling and 94 intersection between the stadium and frontage roads and traffic throughput.

Comment: Regarding sound – one way to mitigate sound is a sound barrier but this effects the ability to do a cap over the highway – there is a connection between NEPA and livability. Similarly, if the cap is successful – it will add traffic which will be important to other users. If you can work this out together we will all benefit.