

Rethinking I-94 Phase 2 Community Conversations

Date: 11/17/2021 (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: I have been participating in this process since the beginning and I am still disappointed in the purpose and need. The project documents are too highway centric, the primary needs all have to do with improving the highway. All the community needs are secondary, you need to reverse the primary and secondary needs.

Comment: What aspects of I-94 require design modification for safety? The inherent purpose of a highway is to facilitate the transportation of people goods and emergency services within and through states. I believe that many drivers agree with and understand this.

Comment: I want to echo the previous comment made about primary and secondary priorities. I want to urge MnDOT to engage with excel for the potential for wind and solar generation. It could provide renewable to surrounding communities.

Comment: I also agree with the problem of the primary and secondary needs. I went to elementary in the Rondo education building and lived on the other side of 94 and I was never allowed to bike to school because the spill over traffic is dangerous. North/South bike and ped traffic is poor because I-94 is a barrier. At some point during traffic modeling there should be consideration for induced demand of the freeway itself has on local streets and the traffic impacts on surrounding streets.

Comment: I agree with the problem of primary and secondary needs. We should prioritize pedestrians not suffering from the negative effects of cars.

Comment: I want to see improvements of bikability and walkability. I want to see the pedestrian bridges maintained and improve and new bridges to connect communities. Increase non-vehicular transportation options.

MnDOT Response: Are there specific locations that you want to see? Is it consistent with the Saint Paul bike plan?

Comment: I experienced challenges when Aldine was closed and all of the alternate routes had their challenges.

Comment: I agree with concerns expressed with bikeability and walkability. I want to go further and ask if the redesign is going to be done in a way that envisions the very different world people will be living in 2-4 decades from now? We don't want to look back and see that we left them with something that doesn't meet their needs.

MnDOT Response: When planning we utilize city comprehensive plans to help plan for the future, we also use modeling. We are trying to take into account innovation.

MnDOT Response: Here are some examples of how we are doing things differently: Normally, we would have subject matter experts to give testimony and inform planning but in this process we are asking people what they would like us to do. We acknowledge planning, land use, and public policy things that need to be addressed. We have included Saint Paul and Minneapolis planning department representatives, we have included planning staff from the U of M, capitol region planning district, and representatives from the counties. This is an important corridor to trauma 3 level hospitals. There are instances when people can't always use transit. We have indeed looked at the future. The challenge in looking at the future is that there are immediate needs that we have identified in the livability process for which MnDOT does not have a leadership role. We also have to decide who we listen to. Those who come first and loudest? We try and listen for the longest as we can and then make changes after listening.

MnDOT Response: We have had these draft documents for a while, but we do not know that we have heard enough and we want to hear from a diverse group of people not just one group of people.

Comment: I think an opportunity here to not think of the 94 corridor in the same way. The project area that you have identified goes through a significant residential area. St Paul and Minneapolis have begun to think more carefully about speed on streets – this is the kind of thinking that is very important so the project area. A lower speed should be explored because it would affect noise, emissions, and highway exiting speeds. People exit at the same speed as they were traveling. We already have in Saint Paul a reduced speed highway so we should look at that.

Comment: You guys say that you still want to hear from people before proposing things, but you are releasing a draft purpose and need statement and that purpose and need statement sets the limits and the goals of the project. This is a federally mandated NEPA process so once you set the Purpose and Need statement, it doesn't matter what people say after the fact because the goals have been set. You need to listen to people when you are creating these documents. There are many things that people in the community would like to be considered but can't be considered because of the limitations of the Purpose and Need. Someone was hit and killed on Griggs and Concordia because people speed on the surface streets near the highway and I don't see how the Purpose and Need with the livability aspects in the secondary position are going to help things that the livability identifies as goals.

MnDOT Response: We have not finalized anything. One of the reasons this session is being held is to ensure that we hear from as many people as possible before we make changes. We have released this early, and we have not made any decisions whatsoever. It is imperative that people know that nothing has been decided definitively.

Comment: What is the actual example of the reduced speed highway in Saint Paul?

MnDOT Response: I think it is 35E

Comment: Mobility is important, but it will look different in 20 years. I want it to be different and we need to examine whether or not these cars belong on this corridor. The original highway was racist so we should question whether a freeway is the best use of land given that there are other freeways. Especially in 20 years we should question the idea of freeways being an appropriate way to measure mobility.

Comment: Can you provide us with contact information if any of us have additional written comment after this?

Comment: Can you tell me where I can find the draft purpose and need statement?

WSB Response: All of the draft documents are online.

Comment: At this point in time we have a lot of business infrastructure along the corridor that could suffer if we got rid of the highway. We can't shoot ourselves in the foot spite ourselves. The way the corridor has developed it is a vital road for business. We can have noise barriers and make things safer as people exit. I think it is here and we have to live with it.